

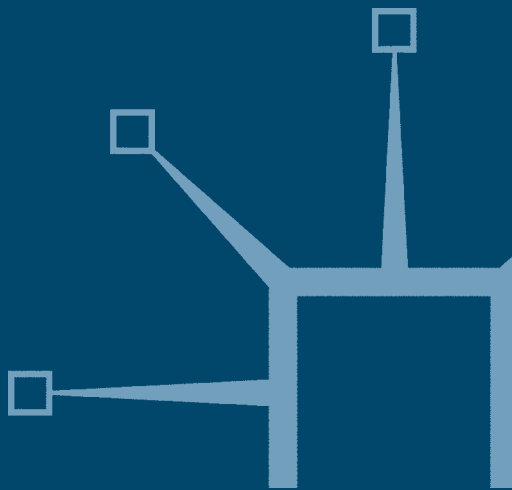
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Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern

Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–53

Edited by

Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and
Matthew Worley



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Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley 2008

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1

Introduction: Stalinization and Communist Historiography

Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley

One of the difficulties in developing an international comparative historiography of communism has been the elusiveness of any agreed framework for transnational comparison. In other respects, the movement's international scope and centralized methods of record-keeping seem ideally suited to comparative work. Since the opening of the Moscow archives in the early 1990s, transnational scholarly networks have also flourished, as have a series of published symposia and research bulletins attest.¹ Nevertheless, between work on national communist parties and analyses of the supranational authority of the Communist International, or Comintern (1919–43), the limited development of genuine comparative work remains striking. E. H. Carr's highly regarded studies might in this respect be seen as a sort of epitome of the literature, combining meticulous party studies with the 'scene from Moscow', and yet offering explicit comparison as little more than a subtext.²

Constraints of language and knowledge more generally affecting comparative labour history must play a role here.³ Doubtless, the development of convincing national studies drawing on the archives was and remains a precondition for informed comparative reflection.⁴ There are also considerations more specific to the subject. Though Carr possessed in abundance the comparativist's language skills and breadth of knowledge, he nevertheless adopted the largely institutional approach to the Comintern and its national sections, which for many years was the literature's most characteristic form. Like the Leninist organizational precepts that discountenanced 'horizontal' links between lower party units, except as mediated by the centre, party histories shaped by these relationships have also tended to focus their analysis from the centre outwards. Even as such an emphasis came under challenge in the 1970s and 1980s, the resulting 'centre-periphery' debate, focusing on the

extent of the communist parties' subordination to Moscow, tended towards a somewhat polarized contraposition of national or subnational factors with the international domination of the Comintern.⁵ Though much important work was produced, by the end of the 1990s the view was being expressed that the centre-periphery debate was running out of steam.⁶

Beyond generalist claims and particularist modifiers, the need has hence been increasingly recognized for more complex, sophisticated and pluri-disciplinary understandings both of communisms (plural) and what held them together as communism (singular). Analogous developments in Soviet studies have been characterized as a maturation and even 'normalization', and the literature on western communist parties has been enriched through a greater openness to wider historiographical concerns.⁷ Nevertheless, considered alongside the extensive comparative literatures on fascism or social democracy, the comparative study of European communism remains surprisingly weak.⁸ Though with an increasing number of distinguished exceptions, the literature traditionally has been overwhelmingly focused on particular national cases or on the Comintern itself.⁹ Even regional studies made only limited use of the comparative method, though the impending publication of a major comparative project on Nordic communism suggests an appetite now exists for such work.¹⁰ Tellingly, examples of transnational comparison have been more in evidence for the post-Comintern period, initially prompted by the exposure in the Eurocommunist period of distinct party narratives sufficiently differentiated to allow for meaningful comparison. The literature comparing the French and Italian communist parties has been particularly abundant. Typically, though, even the most historically ambitious of these accounts, Marc Lazar's *Maisons rouges* (1999), again begins only with the post-Comintern period.¹¹ Only perhaps in Andreas Wirsching's work on Paris and Berlin has extended transnational comparison been combined with recognition of the centralizing imperatives of the Comintern years.¹²

Pondering these issues, we were drawn to the Stalinization concept of the German historian Hermann Weber. Originally expounded in Weber's seminal *Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus* (1969), this concept has been widely invoked to describe the communist parties' transformation by the 1930s into strictly disciplined and centralized instruments of Stalinist power politics.¹³ To this extent, Weber's analysis provided a benchmark for the centre-periphery debate, and the issues he raised were already long familiar by the 1960s. On the other hand, one of the outstanding virtues of Weber's work lay not just in its

mass of empirical detail, but also in the elaboration of a clear analytical framework for the better understanding of these developments. As Geoff Eley observed in welcoming the communist 'social' histories of the 1970s and 1980s, Weber – though his work was rooted in political science – was one of a handful of historians internationally to have risen above 'the usual routines of simplistically politicized understanding'.¹⁴ Compared with the simpler versions of the Moscow-centric narrative, he carefully weighed both exogenous and endogenous factors; and, if the conclusions he reached gave clear priority to the former, the method was one that could be fruitfully applied beyond Weber's particular concern with Weimar Germany. It was the potential of the concept for comparison, though left undeveloped by Weber himself, that gave rise to the idea of the present collection.

Despite the significance of Weber's work, it remains only sketchily understood by English-language historians. Indeed, his major writings, along with the main alternatives presented to them by German historians, have not hitherto been translated into English. One object of the present collection is therefore to introduce readers to Weber's Stalinization thesis and the debates which this has generated in Germany. On this basis, we have asked our contributors to draw on their own research in providing a range of different perspectives on the issues raised by the concept of Stalinization. We have not proposed any single template or set of comparators to be tested in uniform ways. Nor have contributors been asked to provide an explicitly comparative approach, though a number do. Instead, a variety of approaches are adopted, taking in both centre and periphery, comparisons and case studies, the social, cultural, institutional and biographical – to say nothing of differences of period and national context, which, as we suggest here, were to some extent interrelated. Together, the contributions convey something of the complexity of meaningful comparison necessary to accommodate these variables of agency, political function, social implantation and periodization, while recognizing the unequalled structuring role of the Comintern.

In the remainder of this introduction, we set out the main points of the Stalinization debate as a prism through which to view the different aspects of communist politics presented in the individual contributions. On this basis, we also offer some preliminary thoughts as to themes which would bear more sustained examination across different periods, countries and fields of political activity. Our hope is that the collection will provide a stimulus to further comparative reflection as well as an introduction to some of the issues at the heart of the current historiography.

Stalinization and the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*

Weber, in his *Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus*, sought to explain how a mass party in Germany could become comprehensively subordinated to an external source of authority unprecedented in the history of the workers' movement. The German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) was not only the largest of the Comintern's sections outside Russia; until 1923, it seemed also to hold out its one credible chance of revolution in the West. A decade later, according to Weber, it had been reduced to acting in the service of Soviet foreign policy, pursuing an ultra-left strategy that was to prove politically calamitous. In tracing this development, Weber emphasized the far-reaching consequences of the KPD's acceptance of the Soviet party's 'leading role' and the promotion through the Comintern of Bolshevik policies and organizational structures. To this extent, he was not oblivious to the roots of Stalinization in the years preceding Stalin's dominance. Nevertheless, he ascribed a more definitive significance to the period from the mid- to late 1920s in which, as Stalin established his authority in Moscow, the Comintern exploited factional tensions of singular intensity to install, dismiss and finally control successive party leaderships.¹⁵ Between the beginning of Stalinization, which Weber dated from 1924, and its successful completion by the end of the decade, the KPD was transformed from a party with a 'relatively high degree of internal democracy' into a *Diktaturpartei* whose key political lines were all written in Moscow.¹⁶ During the final years of Weimar, this Stalinized KPD proved incapable of significantly modifying the Comintern's assessment that social democracy rather than Nazism was communism's 'main enemy'. With Hitler's accession to power and the KPD's virtual elimination, the Stalinization narrative reached its tragic dénouement in 1933.

Weber's postulate of a relentless centralization of power was a commonplace of commentaries on the communist movement, whether from a conservative, social democratic or dissident Marxist perspective. What was original and distinctive was his explanatory framework. Briefly recapitulated in his contribution to the present collection, Weber's model of Stalinization rested on four interrelated factors: the domination of the party by the party apparatus; the role of internal factionalism; political and material dependence on the Comintern; and the KPD's marginality to German politics. It is the relative sophistication of the model which lends itself to its wider employment as a means of tracing both variation and generic features in communist politics across differences of period and national context.

Weber's first point, the domination of the party apparatus, was one he identified as a more general feature of modern industrial societies. As in this sense a 'modern' party staffed by 'professional revolutionaries', the KPD's centralized chain of command excluded ordinary members and local officials from influencing policy-making. The outcome, according to Weber, was to undermine its activist base, resulting in a rising membership turnover and the failure of members to perform the limited roles the Stalinist model allowed them. The significance of his second point – the rivalry within the KPD of a number of wings and tendencies – was that it prevented the party from finding an independent ideological position beyond both social democracy and syndicalism.¹⁷ In this context, the apparatus itself became the 'motor of unity', integrating the party through a 'military-style' discipline and playing off 'left' and 'right' deviations even when these had virtually ceased to exist. Financial and political dependence on the Soviet Union, Weber's third point, were interrelated. Financially, the KPD relied on 'Moscow gold' both for the apparatus that was so central to the Stalinization model and to support a level of press and campaigning activity that was otherwise unsustainable given the deterioration of the party's activist base. Politically, acceptance of the Comintern's top-down model of democratic centralism, both nationally and internationally, underpinned the domination of the party by the apparatus, while simultaneously binding the latter by policy directives and organizational disciplines imposed from Moscow.

While thus heavily emphasizing the hand of Moscow, Weber, with his fourth point, also recognized the significance of communism's place within the Weimar system. As German politics began to stabilize in the mid-1920s, the KPD was confronted with the dilemma of a revolutionary party trapped in a bourgeois republic. Its early failures, culminating in its inability to launch a 'German October' in 1923, only made it the more receptive to the successful Bolshevik model, and no doubt to the maximalist rhetoric of the Comintern's so-called 'third period' of 1928–35, characterized by extreme hostility to social democracy.¹⁸ This predicament, of a revolutionary party in a non-revolutionary environment, was not specific to Weimar Germany; indeed it was more striking still in most other countries. That this served to reinforce a compensating identification with the Russians was already proposed in a wider context by contemporary commentators like Franz Borkenau.¹⁹

Implicitly or explicitly, the Stalinization model thus touched on a wide range of issues that could fruitfully be explored in other contexts.

Among them were the role of national party leaderships in relation to the Comintern; the significance of both internal factionalism and personal and ideological leadership rivalries; the quality of communist party activism at the local level; party finance and the issue of material dependence on the Comintern; national and subnational patterns of party competition, notably the cleavage between communism and social democracy; and the generalization of common forms of political discipline through the adherence to democratic centralism, both nationally and internationally.

Consideration of the Stalinization model internationally inevitably raises as many questions as it answers. Even in its original German application, it has not gone unchallenged. Within the parameters set by his methodology, Weber's explanatory framework has been largely vindicated in such aspects as increasing Soviet domination of the Comintern apparatus. Though the range of emphases is somewhat wider, there would also be general agreement that individual communist parties by 1933 exercised little independent judgement in what the Comintern saw as key issues of policy and organization. Even the extension of the historiography into the more culturalist territory of communist identities, while going beyond Weber's political science approach, has generated insights and a periodization broadly compatible with the Stalinization narrative.²⁰ Indeed, the hypothesis has been postulated of a process of sociological standardization corresponding to the Stalinization of the political line and effected by the Comintern's no less systematic attempts at cadre formation and biographical control. As Brigitte Studer puts it, communist parties from the early 1930s were Stalinized not only as a result of institutional pressures, but through the internalization of a system of rules, codes, conventions and cognitive structures which together meant both to speak and see 'Bolshevik'.²¹ On these assumptions, the case has also been made for a closer integration of the historiography of Stalinism both within the Soviet Union and beyond it.²²

Nevertheless, if the Stalinization model has also provoked dissension and critique, it is because of what some historians saw as its too restricted frame of reference. In Germany itself, critics drew on the new social history methodologies of the 1970s–1980s to switch the angle of observation from 'high politics' to 'history from below'. They also posed a chronological challenge to Weber's periodization and the weight he attached to 'Stalinizing' pressures from the mid-1920s. In both respects, the post-1989 historiography on German communism has seen greater emphasis placed on endogenous factors, including

the KPD's indigenous political inheritance.²³ A third dimension, going beyond the model's original German application, is to consider the viability of the Stalinization model in relation to other communist parties. This also poses a 'chronological challenge', not only in relation to the pre-Stalin period, but also in respect of the popular front era in which several of these parties enjoyed their greatest political influence of the Comintern period. Whether this provided a sequel, extension or modification of the Stalinization narrative, or combined elements of all three, is open to debate. Nevertheless, it is clear that a Weimar-based model could not simply be transposed to the very different conjunctures of the anti-fascist period, which was also the period of Stalinist hubris and the terror.

German debates

On its appearance in 1969, *Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus* stood firmly within the dominant, western understanding of German communism that had been developed from the early post-war period by historians like Ossip Flechtheim and Richard Löwenthal.²⁴ Shortly afterwards, however, the subject began to be transformed by new studies addressing how the experience of political, economic and social conditions within Germany shaped both the mentalities of rank-and-file party members and the policy-making decisions of their leadership.²⁵ The latter certainly had its parallels in other countries and periods: for example, in debates concerning the inception of the popular front in 1934–35.²⁶ Nevertheless, it was the perspective of a communist history 'from below' that offered the greatest attraction to original scholarship. This, too, was not specific to Germany, or indeed to communism. As Eley pointed out, it drew on 'new' social history methodologies then enjoying a much wider currency and had the appearance of the 'march of historiographical progress into previously recalcitrant fields of study'.²⁷

Within Germany, the most influential of these new interpretations held that the sociological division of the German working class conditioned its political division. After the formation of the United German Communist Party (*Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; VKPD) as a mass-based party at the end of 1920, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) largely retained the support of skilled, employed workers organized in the socialist trade unions. The KPD, conversely, found its main support among unskilled, unemployed and often unorganized 'mass' workers,

who identified with its attacks on reformism's alleged 'betrayals'.²⁸ These historians did not overlook Moscow's influence, though some (in Uta Stolle's words) may have relegated it to the 'second strand of causation'.²⁹ Primarily, however, they were interested in areas of communist politics, in the workplace and neighbourhood, in which the idea of an evenly predominating Soviet influence was considerably more problematic. In the work of Eric Weitz, the outstanding example of such scholarship in English, stress was laid on the notion of political space as both opportunity and constraint, shaping the character of communist politics in ways that went beyond the intentions or capabilities of its leadership. Weitz acknowledged the importance of what he called a 'circumscribed political history' in delineating some aspects of communist history. He also underlined its inadequacy in respect of other aspects, not intrinsically of a lesser order, such as the capacity or lack of it to form mass parties.³⁰

Though the historiography had clearly moved on since the late 1960s, it was not until the mid-1990s that a new voice within it, Klaus-Michael Mallmann's, issued a direct challenge to Weber's Stalinization thesis.³¹ In place of a monolithic party subservient to Moscow, Mallmann presented German communism as a relatively autonomous, mass-based social movement rooted in a diversity of local conditions. What Sigmund Neumann famously called a party of 'absolutist integration' had, in this reading, been a programmatic intention, not an achievable aim. Mallmann accepted that in some regions a hate-filled gulf separated the two workers' parties. Where he proposed a novel and even iconoclastic reading was in also identifying a locally based 'left-proletarian milieu' in which party divisions within the workers' movement appeared much shallower than in almost any previous account, from whatever perspective. Focusing on the Saarland, he argued that both wings of the workers' movement inhabited a 'niche society' rooted in the pre-war socialist counter-culture, and continuing to span the party divide in unions, co-operatives and cultural associations, as well as in working-class neighbourhoods and families.

Like Weitz's work, Mallmann's concept of the milieu reflected the influence of wider historiographical developments, notably in respect of community. It may thus be compared with earlier studies elsewhere, such as Stuart Macintyre's *Little Moscovs* (1980) and Mark Naison's account of Harlem in the 1930s.³² Indeed, although Mallmann took issue with what he called the 'orthodoxy' of the Weber view, a decade earlier Theodore Draper had described the prolific production of such scholarship in the United States as itself already a 'new orthodoxy' and

'minor academic industry'.³³ In obvious contrast to Weber, Mallmann argued that communists' primary location in this 'milieu' – rather than the party *per se* – informed a series of shared values and experiences which provided the basis for working-class solidarity as much as fratricidal conflict. It also enabled 'ordinary' communists to ignore or reinterpret central party directives as transmitted by the *apparat*.³⁴ Despite the leadership's diatribes against 'opportunism' – the remnants of reformism in the party's ranks – many rank-and-file activists remained 'Social Democrats against their will' as the only means of resolving the structural dilemma of being in a revolutionary party in a non-revolutionary era.³⁵ Explicitly presented as an alternative to the Stalinization thesis, Mallmann's account did not merely reject the notion of Moscow's controlling hand. It also threw into question the idea of a binary opposition between the two workers' parties which, despite their differences of interpretation, had been common to both Weber and Weitz. In response, some critics argued that Mallmann failed to demonstrate the existence of a 'left-proletarian milieu' and overstated the areas of consensus between the two workers' parties.³⁶ Weitz himself felt that his 'strong case' for the importance of locality was undermined by excessive neglect of the national and transnational dimensions of communist politics.³⁷ This, at least, was not yet an orthodoxy.

Even among Mallmann's critics, there was more support for his challenge to the notion that Stalinization ended an early democratic phase of German communism.³⁸ Though Mallmann was hardly the first to have issued this challenge, in affirming that 'it did not take Stalin to Stalinize the KPD' he did so in characteristically provocative terms.³⁹ (Ironically, given his identifying Weber with a 'Western' interpretation of the KPD, it is actually former East German historians who have been prominent in recent attempts to reaffirm the 'democratic' or 'Luxemburgist' traditions of German communism.)⁴⁰ Among works contemporaneous with Weber's, Walter Kendall's *Revolutionary Movement in Britain* (1969) supported its stress on exogenous factors, yet concluded in 1921 with the issues of dependency and subordination already settled.⁴¹ In the US, Draper's pioneering histories of the 1950s also outlined a process of subordination well under way by the early 1920s.⁴² In France, where there were many democratic elements among the founding cohorts of the French Communist Party (*Parti communiste français*; PCF), there was perhaps more support for a Weberian periodization in Annie Kriegel's work.⁴³ Nevertheless, nowhere more than in Germany has the notion of a prelapsarian phase of communism proved so influential.

An international model?

Critics of Mallmann argued that he had not sufficiently recognized the atypicality of the Saar, which in a German context was plausibly regarded as a 'special case'.⁴⁴ Internationally, however, the issue of typicality poses itself rather differently and to some extent provides a testing ground for Stalinization itself. Where Weber's critics stressed the specificities of German communism, one might, for example, expect their emphasis on endogenous factors to produce marked variations, not only at the level of local or regional milieux, but between different national cases. Conversely, notions of variation and atypicality appear almost by definition to require explanation at the level of the particular. If 'the Comintern dictated the same strategy and tactics to all the parties, and the national parties dictated the same strategy and tactics to all the local units', significant variation could only have originated somewhere outside this line of command.⁴⁵

By the same token, the stronger the exogenous determinants of communist politics, the greater the homogenization one would expect to find, both nationally and internationally. To this extent, the validity of the Stalinization narrative presupposed its analytical purchase beyond the specific German context. It is true that by the late 1920s, German issues, like the German language and German functionaries, were at the centre of the Comintern's preoccupations; these, after all, were the grounds on which Carr's *Twilight of Comintern* (1982) dispensed with a separate chapter on the KPD.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, if the Saarland was untypical of Germany, the question may usefully be posed of which was the more typical of communism internationally: for example, in France or the Low Countries? In case that risks the suggestion of a Stalinized *Sonderweg*, perhaps the notion of a generalized typicality is itself one that can be usefully problematized.

The issue can be viewed both synchronically and diachronically. Long pre-dating the KPD's formation, the SPD had already become a highly bureaucratized, hierarchical and authoritarian party.⁴⁷ The seam of authoritarianism was then intensified by the experience of 'total war' – shared, of course, by the other major European powers – and by the violent and highly polarized political culture more specific to Weimar Germany.⁴⁸ Echoing contemporaries like Erich Fromm, commentators have noted how the 'weakness' of the failing Weimar Republic precipitated a 'rebellious authoritarianism' and search for compensating symbols of strength, especially among young workers. If this assisted the acceptance of 'iron discipline', relations between

Germany's two workers' parties were peculiarly acrimonious; and the KPD's perception of the SPD's several 'betrayals', from the suppression of the 'November Revolution' onwards, created the 'negative fixation' which allowed it to see the SPD as its 'main enemy'.⁴⁹ To the extent that these conditions were specific to Germany, the generalization during the 'third period' of a sectarian, confrontational and ultra-disciplined style of politics might indeed suggest that it was not these local specificities that mattered, but the acceptance of a single common source of authority.

It is here that a diachronic perspective illuminates, for it was precisely in the period following the relaxation and abandonment of this so-called 'class against class' strategy that several communist parties enjoyed a qualitative improvement in their political fortunes. There is no need to disinter the old argument as to whether pressures from the periphery brought about the change in policy. Rather, as Christophe Charle has observed in relation to the British party, a 'mass communism of the continental type' only proved possible once it had abandoned its revolutionary programme for what Charle calls an 'ecumenical humanism of the left', predicated on anti-fascism.⁵⁰ Whether one accepts such a characterization, it was in this period that commentators have identified the 'heyday' of smaller parties like those in Britain and the US, while genuinely mass communist parties were established in both France and post-war Italy.⁵¹ As Wirsching's research shows, while the German and French communist parties can both be identified with an ideal-type 'totalitarian' movement, differing traditions and experiences produced different 'national communisms' affecting the ability even of willing executors to implement common policies in diverse settings. One result was that, while the KPD was predisposed to the ideologically driven ultra-radicalism of the third period, the PCF, as Kriegel had observed, functioned best in periods when ideological rigidity was relaxed.⁵²

As Wirsching's diachronic time-frame recognizes, the latter experience largely passed the KPD by. Whereas the popular front and resistance experiences were central to the identity of the French and Italian parties, Weber observed in 1991 how the structures, mechanisms and leadership corps of post-war German communism were all established in the post-1945 period.⁵³ Moreover, the intervening period was hardly one of a simple hiatus. As Weitz puts it, it was again Weber's 'really heroic effort' that established both the extent of the KPD's subordination to the Comintern and the terrible losses its leading cadres suffered at Stalin's hands as well as Hitler's.⁵⁴ There was hardly a communist

party that was entirely spared such experiences, and the apparatus of the Comintern suffered particularly cruelly in the terror. Nevertheless, the highly differentiated experiences of these different communist 'milieux', including the milieu that was the apparatus itself, emerge from any casual review of the literature.⁵⁵

Reflections

In his contribution to the present collection, Hermann Weber strongly reaffirms his original conception of Stalinization. Indeed, in shifting the weight towards the third of his explanatory factors – dependence on Moscow – Weber reinforces the case against those he believes have insufficiently acknowledged this dependence, and does so on the basis of the fuller documentation made accessible since he first wrote on the subject. Within certain limits, the case he makes is hardly now a matter of contention, and readers will find a wide acceptance here of the basic dynamic of institutional subordination which Weber characterized as Stalinization. Inferentially, the common usage of de-Stalinization to describe later developments within communism, internationally as well as in the Soviet Union, logically presupposes a prior experience of Stalinization whose core attributes remained intact while Stalin lived. The limits, therefore, are what is at issue; and, on the origin, scope and duration of Stalinization – its quality as outcome as well as tendency – the testing of these limits internationally, as Kerry Taylor and Matthew Worley put it in their contribution, reveals a variety of complicating factors that in some cases may be seen to bring into question the validity of the concept as originally proposed. If de-Stalinization implied a relaxation of the movement's central command system and greater susceptibility to different national political pressures, it was almost inherently neither an even nor a uniform process; in a literal sense, it was disintegrative. The conundrum for historians of the Comintern period is how far the integrative process described by Weber may also have been subject to significant variation, when its underlying rationale was manifestly one of homogenization and closure.

Crucially, one returns to the issue of its timing. Adapting Weber's periodization to the Comintern as a whole, Jürgen Rojahn has proposed an extension of the Stalinization phase to 1934, with the Comintern thereafter functioning, as Weber indicated, as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy.⁵⁶ The closing of the time-frame by the mid-1930s finds plenty of support in the present collection. Brigitte Studer and Emmet O'Connor find corroboration in the French, Swiss

and Irish cases. So does Ben Fowkes, discussing communist attitudes to the national question in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and similarly Peter Huber in analysing the composition of the Comintern's leading bodies. By the time of the Comintern's seventh congress in July–August 1935, the seismic shift to the popular front was accompanied by no significant ruptures or even debates, but only ovations at the constant ritual invocation of Stalin's name.

What even at a glance appears more problematic is the dating of this process only from 1924. Continuing with the Comintern's congresses as a sort of benchmark, the first of these in 1919 may reasonably be discounted as but a signal of intent. Already at the second world congress the following year, however, the adoption of the famous '21 conditions' of admission, frequently referred to by contributors here, included provisions for regular purges, the systematic centralization of power and acceptance of the binding nature of Comintern decisions. At the third congress in 1921, organizational theses were then adopted which even Lenin described as too Russian, but which were bolstered by further centralizing measures at the fourth world congress in 1922. Comintern finances were also brought under tight control, allowing the calculating deployment of the subsidies on which Weber's account laid considerable stress. If the fifth world congress of 1924 is the first at which any conceivable claim could be made of Stalin's dominance, which the sixth in 1928 certainly confirmed, some may think that a dynamic of discipline–subordination was already abundantly in evidence. Periodization is thus also pre-eminently an issue of agency and political provenance. Did it only take Stalin to Stalinize the Comintern?

Bolshevization in any case has been the preferred term of many scholars. In their history of the Comintern, Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew use it precisely to describe the 'trend towards Russian dominance of the Comintern' through the inculcation of unity, discipline and organizational centralization; in other words, something very like Stalinization.⁵⁷ The advantage of Bolshevization is that it allows for Russifying influences that cannot be traced to Stalin and pre-dated his political ascendancy. Unlike Stalinization, it was also the stated object of the communists themselves. Here, however, is a further ambiguity; for it was only in 1924–25 that the Comintern adopted this usage, which – like the simultaneous construction of 'Leninism' – to this extent becomes a signal of Stalinization and underlines its character as a watershed moment. Presumably with this in mind, Rojahn refers indifferently to a period of 'Bolshevization/Stalinization' dating from 1924.

Like Stalinization, however, the force of Bolshevization may conceivably have been felt even in advance of its formulation as a slogan. It is true, as Peter Huber notes here, that the working through of the Comintern's early centralizing measures took time. The problem in respect of Stalinization is that it took less time in Germany than almost anywhere else. In describing Paul Levi's exclusion from the KPD as early as 1921, Jean-François Fayet identifies a turning from which, as it transpired, there was to be no going back. Andreas Wirsching traces back still further 'Leninist principles of organization and struggle', implicating Levi himself. Both propose what Wirsching calls the KPD's 'very early Bolshevization', and Weber himself allows that a 'prehistory' of Stalinization can be dated from 1921–22. Like Brigitte Studer here, he nevertheless believes that a qualitative change in communist politics must be associated with the rise of Stalin. Much may hinge on whether this is seen as a change of direction, or one of tempo and intensity.

Ironically, Stalinization as a sort of late Bolshevization may seem more applicable to cases like Ireland and Spain than to Germany itself. As Emmet O'Connor and Gina Herrmann show, it was only in the Stalin period, and under the direction of functionaries trained at the Lenin School founded in the mid-1920s, that something like conformity to the Bolshevik model was achieved in these cases. Not with the synchronicity of one of the Comintern's lines, but proceeding from the centre outwards, Bolshevization/Stalinization may thus be seen as a centrally driven transformation of the Comintern's constituent parts, which was precociously effected in front-line Germany, to whose culture and predicament it was readily if not wisely adapted. The sense of external agency stressed by Weber may actually have been stronger in other countries to which its forms of mobilization seemed more obviously unsuited. At the same time, this meant that the ambition of Stalinization in such cases was often less than fully realized. The significance of such variations is itself a matter of judgement. Germany, almost like Russia, was central to the history of communism in a way that New Zealand, at the other extreme, clearly was not. The experience that Weber described was thus a defining one. Nevertheless, its specificity also needs to be recognized: not only in relation to the Comintern fringe, but also with respect to parties in Italy, France and Finland whose membership and electorate eventually outstripped anything seen in Weimar Germany.

Specificities of chronology, contiguity with Moscow and domestic political alignment may be highlighted. Leaving aside the question of pre-Stalinization, the correspondence of Weber's Stalinization narrative

with standard Comintern chronologies, here summarized by Peter Huber, is itself but another indication of the centrality of Germany to the Comintern's worldview. If Germany's failed October was like Europe's revolutionary swansong, occurring in the year (1923) of Lenin's final stroke, so a decade later Hitler's accession to power proved another crucial watershed coinciding with Stalin's emerging dictatorship and precipitating the turn to the popular front. Whatever judgements are made as to precedence or intentionality, there seems no escaping the interdependence of the two chronologies.

Other communist histories, however, were shaped by national chronologies hardly even registering in the formulation of an international line. The external character of this line was perhaps especially evident in the case of movements and parties under colonial rule guided by a Eurocentric agenda of fascism and anti-fascism.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, disjunctures and discrepancies – for example, in the timing of social or political crisis and opportunity – could also generate counter-vailing pressures. Of these, the most basic was the experience of illegality. In Germany, the communists' especially ruthless and systematic suppression after 1933 uprooted an apparatus without a party and exposed leading cadres to the crueller subordination of Stalin's terror. This was true of other illegal communist parties, such as those in Finland and Italy. In France, Serge Wolikow has argued that it was precisely the experience of illegality that assisted the party's Stalinization following the more ambiguous period of the popular front.⁵⁹ In Finland, on the other hand, Tauno Saarela here describes how the leadership's early removal to Russia, while subjecting it more closely to Moscow's authority, at the same time undermined its authority over communists within Finland. Neither Bolshevization nor Stalinization, in this reading, can be applied to these communists in any straightforward way. In Italy, which shared Finland's experience of illegality pre-dating effective Bolshevization, Aldo Agosti recognizes the party's formal compliance with the demands of Stalinization, while similarly underlining the importance of a social and cultural milieu whose relations with the apparatus were often precarious.

Contiguity with Moscow, whether or not assisted by the experience of exile, varied widely. For reasons of size, language, strategic importance and geographical proximity, relations between Berlin and Moscow were peculiarly direct and unmediated. Though this could in theory have increased the KPD's independent political leverage, in practice the party was exposed to unremitting concern for its reliability as at once front-line transmission belt and exemplar. Like the Spanish

party during the Civil War (1936–39), the KPD was both a paradigmatic case and a rallying point for communists internationally, and an exceptional one, because of the intense preoccupation with it of the Comintern and Soviet security organs. As Gina Herrmann shows, the Spanish case has consequently figured prominently in discussions of popular front era Stalinism.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, as Kerry Taylor and Matthew Worley point out, not only in New Zealand but also in Britain, the Comintern did not, for example, even have a permanent representative stationed by the mid-1930s. In Finland, language provided an additional barrier to the reception of key texts and directives. Where parties at the periphery played a mentoring or mediating role, as Britain's for example did in Ireland, further possibilities existed for tensions and misunderstandings. The close, continuous, high-profile and prodigally resourced interaction between Berlin and Moscow in the 1920s was not representative of the Comintern experience as a whole.

Domestic cleavages in Weber's account of German communism were overwhelmingly factional ones. Factionalism had always had a strong significance for German social democracy, reflecting the weakness or else subordination of other possible cleavages. Within the framework of a unified and secular nation state, all was subsumed under the rubric of class, whose structural differentiation provided the main possible basis for communism as itself in essence a factional breakaway from social democracy. This, however, was only one possible basis for communist politics. Even in France, which like Italy experienced a split within social democracy akin to Germany's, socialism prior to 1917 had never achieved the SPD's cohesion, and there was no comparable sense of the primacy of party over industrial and other forms of mobilization. If this gave rise to the markedly differing characteristics described by Andreas Wirsching, the US represents a different variation again, marked by the still weaker presence of party. In these circumstances, as Edward Johanningsmeier shows, the early communist party was not really a breakaway at all, but a new organizational focus for a cadre of predominantly industrial activists. Not faction, but a syndicalist 'current' thus persisted within American communism, for which no German equivalent really existed. In listing communist leaders emerging through the Red Trade Union International, Johanningsmeier mentions Americans, Britons, a Frenchman – but no German.

Randi Storch, in her chapter on Chicago, shows the importance of other forms of cleavage entirely, here notably ethnic and linguistic difference. Where language sections provided a refuge for particularist

identities and older socialist mentalities, Bolshevization took the form of a sort of 'Americanization', even at the expense of significant organizational losses. In showing how Comintern archives can be used to illuminate grassroots communist politics, the chapter is another reminder that Stalinization is not the whole truth, even if it is nothing but the truth. This is certainly Brigitte Studer's argument in opening a window onto the rich seam of literature on communist subjectivities and the Stalinist construction of the self. Biography, Edward Johanningsmeier suggests, presents a further level of complexity; and Norman LaPorte and Kevin Morgan in their chapter show how the Stalinist cult of leadership serves at once to corroborate and to problematize the Stalinization narrative. This may indeed be thought the overall effect of the collection as a whole.

The strength of a term like Stalinization is that it conveys the sense of process; its contestability lies as much as anything in suggestions of its closure and completion. If ever the process did reach a sort of culmination, it must have been in the Cold War years, which in Russia and beyond are reasonably described as the time of 'high' Stalinism. In Germany's eastern sector, the Stalinized party now entered into its inheritance, under relations of control and subordination as clear and direct as Berlin's *Stalinallee*. Even in this period, however, the spectre of faction was rearing its head in Yugoslavia in spectacular fashion.⁶¹ If both the German and Yugoslav parties are to be regarded as effectively Stalinized by the mid-1930s, other dynamics within communism need equal recognition by which alone these persistent variations, even at the highest level, can plausibly be explained.

Notes

- 1 For the former, see M. Narinsky and J. Rojahn (eds), *Centre and Periphery: The History of the Comintern in the Light of New Documents* (Amsterdam: IISH, 1996); S. Wolikow (ed.), *Une Histoire en révolution. Du bon usage des archives, de Moscou et d'ailleurs* (Dijon: EUD, 1996); T. Saarela and K. Rentola (eds.), *Communism: National and International* (Helsinki: SHS, 1998); T. Rees and A. Thorpe (eds), *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); M. Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004). For the latter, see for example the *International Newsletter of Communist Studies* (<http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/JHK-news/>); the *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung*; the *Communist History Network Newsletter* (<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/chnn/>); and the continuing appearance of the journal *Communisme*, founded in the 1980s.

- 2 See, for example, E. H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930–35* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982).
- 3 S. Berger, 'Guest Editorial', *International and Comparative History: Socialist History*, 17 (2000).
- 4 Among the growing number of examples one might mention B. Studer, *Un parti sous influence. Le parti communiste suisse, une section du Komintern, 1931 à 1939* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1994); T. Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunistin synty, 1918–23* (Tampere: KSL, 1996); S. Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998); A. Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920–1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); G. Voerman, *De meridiaan van Moskou: de CPN en de Communistische Internationale 1919–30* (Amsterdam: Veen, 2001); E. O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004); S. D. Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919–43: Dialectics of a Real and Possible History* (Calcutta: Seribaan, 2006).
- 5 For a judicious overview, see K. McDermott and J. Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).
- 6 See, for example, B. Studer and B. Unfried, 'At the Beginning of History: Visions of the Comintern after the Opening of the Archives', *International Review of Social History*, 42 (1997), 419–46; K. Morgan, 'Labour with Knobs On? The Recent Historiography of the British Communist Party', *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 27 (2002), pp. 69–84. For more recent symposia reflecting this changing mood, see K. Morgan, G. Cohen and A. Flinn (eds.), *Agents of Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005); B. Studer and H. Haumann (eds.), *Stalinistische Subjekte: Individuum und System in der Sowjetunion und der Komintern 1929–53* (Zurich: Chronos, 2006).
- 7 L. Viola, 'The Cold War in American Soviet Historiography and the End of the Soviet Union', *Russian Review*, 61 (2002), 25–34.
- 8 Compare, for example, with S. G. Larsen, B. Hagtvet and J. P. Myklebust (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1980); M. Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); M. Lazar (ed.), *La Gauche en Europe depuis 1945: invariants et mutations du socialisme européen* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996); S. Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860–1980: The Class Cleavage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Note should also be made of a work such as D. Geary, *European Labour Protest, 1848–1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), which discusses the split between social democracy and communism in a broader long-term narrative.
- 9 See, for example, G. Swain, 'Wreckage of Recovery? A Tale of Two Parties', in Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution*, pp. 129–51; A. Drew, 'Bolshevizing Communist Parties: The Algerian and South African Experiences', *International Review of Social History*, 48 (2003), 167–202; N. LaPorte and M. Worley, 'Towards a Comparative History of Communism: The British and German Communist Parties to 1933', in *Contemporary British History* (forthcoming, 2008).

- 10 Edited by Svend Rybner, the project's findings are to be published in English in 2008. See also, for example, A. E. Upton, *The Communist Parties of Scandinavia and Finland* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973); R. J. Alexander, *Communism in Latin America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1957); M. Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern, 1919–43* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 11 M. Lazar, *Maisons Rouges. Les Partis communistes français et italien de la Libération à nos jours* (Paris: Aubier 1992). Other comparative studies include D. Blackmer and S. Tarrow (eds.), *Communism in Italy and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); B. Groppo and G. Riccamboni, *La sinistra e il '56 in Italia e in Francia* (Padua: Liviana, 1987); R. Tiersky, *Ordinary Stalinism: Democratic Centralism and the Question of Political Development* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985); C. Guiat, *The French and Italian Communist Parties: Comrades and Culture* (London: Cass, 2003).
- 12 A. Wirsching, *Vom Weltkrieg zum Bürgerkrieg? Politischer Extremismus in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1918–1933/39. Berlin und Paris im Vergleich* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1999).
- 13 H. Weber, *Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus, Volume I. Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/M: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969).
- 14 G. Eley, 'International Communism in the Heyday of Stalin', *New Left Review*, 157 (1986), 90.
- 15 Weber, *Wandlung*, pp. 53–238.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 8–9, 232–47.
- 17 Weber, *Wandlung*, pp. 328–42.
- 18 For international perspectives, see Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution*.
- 19 F. Borkenau, *The Communist International* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938).
- 20 Important collections are C. Pannetier and B. Pudal (eds), *Autobiographies, autocritiques, aveux dans le monde communiste* (Paris: Belin, 2002); B. Studer, B. Unfried and I. Hermann (eds), *Parler de soi sous Staline: La construction identitaire dans le communisme des années trente* (Paris: MSH, 2002).
- 21 B. Studer, 'La femme nouvelle', in M. Dreyfus et al. (eds), *Le Siècle des communismes* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), pp. 381–4.
- 22 See Studer and Haumann, 'Enleitung'/'Introduction', in Studer and Haumann, *Stalinistische Subjekte*, pp. 9–64; for some caveats, see K. Morgan, 'New Works in the Study of Stalinism', *Communist History Network Newsletter*, 20 (2006).
- 23 For appraisals of the debate, see S. Koch-Baumgarten, 'Eine Wende in der Geschichtsschreibung zur KPD in der Weimarer Republik?', *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 46, 1 (1998), 82–9; N. LaPorte, *The German Communist Party in Saxony, 1924–33* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 17–38.
- 24 O. K. Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Hamburg: Janus, 1986 edition); R. Löwenthal, 'The Bolshevisation of the Spartacus League', in D. Footman (ed.), *International Communism* (Carbondale, IL: Illinois University Press, 1960), pp. 23–71.
- 25 The literature is extensive. For an impressive survey focusing on the mid-1920s, see H. A. Winkler, *Schein der Normalität. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik, 1924–30* (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), pp. 417–65.
- 26 J. Haslam, 'The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front, 1934–35', *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), 673–91.

- 27 Eley, 'International Communism', 91.
- 28 Influential studies include D. Peukert, 'Zur Sozialgeschichte der KPD', *Zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 4 (1978), 29–54; U. Stolle, *Arbeiterpolitik im Betrieb: Frauen und Männer, Reformisten und Radikale, Fach und Massenarbeiter bei Bayern, BASF, Bosch und in Solingen (1900–1933)*, (Frankfurt/M: Campus, 1980); L. Heer-Kleinert, *Die Gewerkschaftspolitik der KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/M: Campus, 1983). For a fuller commentary and references, see LaPorte, *Saxon KPD*, pp. 22–30.
- 29 Stolle, *Arbeiterpolitik*, p. 262.
- 30 E. D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990: From Popular Protest to Socialist State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). The concept of political space is also stressed in E. Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence, 1929–33* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 31 K.-M. Mallmann, *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik: Sozialgeschichte einer revolutionären Bewegung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), p. 72 and *passim*.
- 32 S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Interwar Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); M. Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983).
- 33 T. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986 edition), pp. 445–82.
- 34 Mallmann, *Kommunisten*, pp. 84–164, 353f.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 381, also pp. 18–54, 261–83, 294–303, 312ff.
- 36 Koch-Baumgarten, 'Eine Wende in der Geschichtsschreibung', 84; A. Wirsching, '"Stalinisierung" oder entideologisierte "Nischengesellschaft"? Alte Einschichten und neue Thesen zum Charakter der KPD in der Weimarer Republik', *Vierteljahresheft für Zeitgeschichte*, 45 (1997), 449–66.
- 37 Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, p. 14.
- 38 Weber, *Wandlung*, p. 8.
- 39 Mallmann, *Sozialgeschichte*, pp. 57 and 59ff. Important earlier reference points include H.-M. Bock, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918–23* (Meisenheim-am-Glan: Anton Hain, 1969), pp. 137ff; S. Bahne, '"Sozialfascismus" in Deutschland: Zur Geschichte eines politischen Begriffes', *International Review of Social History*, 10 (1965), 211–45; see also Weitz's critique of the anti-democratic elements in Rosa Luxemburg's thinking, *Creating German Communism*, pp. 78–99, 181–5.
- 40 See K. Kinner, *Der deutsche Kommunismus. Selbstverständnis und Realität* (Berlin: Dietz, 1999); Kinner et al. (eds.), *Luxemburg oder Stalin. Schaltjahr 1928. Die KPD am Scheideweg* (Berlin: Dietz, 2003).
- 41 W. Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1910–21* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969).
- 42 Draper, *American Communism*; also *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1957).
- 43 A. Kriegel, *Aux origines du Communisme français. Contribution à l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier français* 2 vols (Paris: Mouton, 1964).
- 44 LaPorte, *KPD in Saxony*, p. 30.
- 45 Draper, *American Communism*, p. 462.
- 46 Carr, *Twilight*, p. viii.

- 47 For a comparison, see A. Aviva, 'The SPD and the KPD at the End of the Weimar Republic: Similarity within Contrast', *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 14, 2 (1978), 171–86.
- 48 Mallmann, *Sozialgeschichte*, pp. 145ff, 230ff.
- 49 See, for example, Heer-Kleinert, *Gewerkschaftspolitik*, pp. 282ff, 360, 375ff.
- 50 C. Charle, *La Crise des Sociétés Impériales. Allemagne, France, Grande-Bretagne 1900–40. Essai d'histoire sociale comparée* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2001), p. 449.
- 51 H. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); K. Morgan, G. Cohen and A. Flinn, *Communists in British Society, 1920–91* (London: Rivers Oram 2006).
- 52 Wirsching, *Von Weltkrieg*, pp. 6–16, 612, 620–1; A. Kriegel, *The French Communists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).
- 53 Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, p. 5.
- 54 Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, p. 299; H. Weber and D. Staritz (eds), *Kommunisten verfolgen Kommunisten. Stalinistischer Terror und "Säuberungen" in den kommunistischen Parteien Europas seit den dreissiger Jahren* (Berlin: Akademie, 1993); H. Weber and U. Mähler, *Terror. Stalinistische Säuberungen 1936–53* (Paderborn: Schoeningh Ferdinand, 1999); H. Weber, "'Weise Flecken" in der Geschichte: Die KPD-Opfer der Stalinschen Säuberungen und ihre Rehabilitierung (Frankfurt/M: ISP, 1990).
- 55 For the terror, see K. McDermott, 'Stalinist Terror in the Comintern: New Perspectives', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30, 1 (1995), 111–30; F. I. Firsov, 'Dimitrov, the Comintern and Stalinist Repression', in B. McLoughlin and K. McDermott (eds), *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 56–82.
- 56 J. Rojahn, 'A Matter of Perspective: Some Remarks on the Periodization of the History of the Communist International', in Narinsky and Rojahn (eds.), *Centre and Periphery*, pp. 38–40.
- 57 McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, chapter 2.
- 58 The same Eurocentricity also frames the present collection. For a sense of the issues see, for example, J. P. Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India: M. N. Roy and Comintern Policy, 1920–39* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- 59 S. Wolikow, 'Stalinisation et cercles dirigeants des PC: Le cas français des années trente aux lendemains de la guerre', in Studer and Haumann (eds.), *Stalinistische Subjekte*, p. 276.
- 60 See, for example, S. Courtois and J.-L. Panné, 'The Shadow of the NKVD in Spain', in Courtois et al, *The Black Book of Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 33–52.
- 61 See, for example, G. Swain, 'Tito: the Formation of a Disloyal Bolshevik', *International Review of Social History*, 34 (1989), 248–71. Still more strikingly, Mao's less tractable leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and marginalization of Moscow-trained Bolsheviks occurred as early as January 1935.

2

The Stalinization of the KPD: Old and New Views

Hermann Weber

Ever since 1959 and my earliest investigations into the history of the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) I have pointed to its 'Stalinization'.¹ This 'section of the Communist International' (Comintern) copied the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) step by step until, by 1929, it had become 'an appendage' of the 'Stalinist' Soviet party.² As I stated in the introduction to the first extensive documentary collection on the history of German communism, published in 1963, 'Stalinism, imported into the KPD through the channel of the Comintern, completely ruined the party's political character and its capacity for intellectual leadership'.³

Stalinization affected the whole of the Comintern, as I noted in 1966.⁴ With 'Bolshevization', Moscow assigned a new role to the Comintern:

By this time, its policy was oriented towards the assumed interests of the Soviet state. The Comintern thereby became Stalin's instrument. Of course, this change of function was not a single event but a gradual transformation. Stalin subjected the individual communist parties to constant purges, just as he did the CPSU.⁵

Finally, in 1969, I provided an exhaustive description and analysis of the Stalinization of the KPD over the period 1924–29.⁶ I continue to abide by the essential features of what I wrote at that time. Stalinization, the transformation of communism, meant for the KPD a change from a party exercising internal democracy to a rigidly disciplined organization with a strictly centralized power command. Stalinization meant a remodelling of the party's internal structure, making it monolithic and hierarchical. The members were ruled by the top echelon of

the party with the help of the apparatus (official functionaries dependent on the party leadership for their position) and, above all, party policy was implemented exclusively in the spirit of the Stalinist CPSU, in line with its directives. The radical Marxist party founded by Rosa Luxemburg had developed into a party of the Stalinist apparatus, an auxiliary militia of Stalin's Soviet Union. Thus, as summarized in 1969:

Eventually, it was not just the internal structure of the KPD that changed but its politics. Communism emerged in Germany as a continuation of the revolutionary German workers' movement. Its socialist goal corresponded to the intentions of the radical workers and communist intellectuals who wanted to establish the classless society. The Stalinization of the KPD, the domination of the movement by the apparatus and its complete dependence on the Stalin leadership in Moscow, caused this goal to rigidify into a mere ideology and transformed the party's function. Now it endeavoured to bring about the rule of an apparatus in the Stalinist mould instead of striving for the self-emancipation of the working class. Its highest obligation was to subordinate itself to Stalin's policy and to defend it. It was the transformation of the KPD through Stalinization which finally made it possible to carry out the ultra-left policy of the years 1929 to 1933, which was to make an essential contribution to the downfall of the Weimar Republic.⁷

Documents now available allow us to place the start of Stalinization somewhat earlier than I did in 1969. The gradual 'Bolshevization' which took place from 1921–22 onwards should be regarded as the pre-history of the KPD's Stalinization. The party's centralization and dependence on the Soviet Union were admittedly more pronounced than I had assumed, but the subsequent Stalinization was of a different quality.

Prerequisites of Stalinization

In 1969, using existing publications and the archive materials available in the West at that time, I took as my central theme what I saw as the four essential conditions for the Stalinization of the KPD. Two prerequisites of a general and two of a special nature could be distinguished. The first general condition related to the role of the apparatus in political parties, that is to say the rule of the apparatus over the organization as a phenomenon of contemporary politics.⁸ Second, were the

KPD's own structural problems. The party was at first uncertain of its ideological and political location between social democracy and syndicalism, a situation which in turn strengthened the role of the apparatus with regard to its 'party officials'. The two further features of the KPD's Stalinization I summarized in the following way:

There is no doubt that the dependence of the KPD on the Soviet Union, which grew progressively from 1919 onwards, was an important prerequisite for Stalinization, and the most obvious one. Even more than the party itself, the KPD's apparatus fell into an increasing dependence on Moscow, not least financially. Since the KPD counted purely as a section of the Comintern and did not constitute an independent party, this dependence had a formal justification. ... Since Stalinism developed in the Soviet Union itself into the ruling political system, the authoritarian spirit of the Soviet state system did not fail to spread out through the Russian leaders of the Comintern to its foreign sections. This meant not only the subordination of the KPD to Soviet state policy, but its adoption of all the forms of rule by the apparatus.

A fourth prerequisite of Stalinization was the discrepancy, so characteristic of the KPD in Germany after 1924, between the revolutionary objectives of the party and the non-revolutionary situation in which it functioned. After the end of the revolutionary upheavals of the early 1920s, and in view of the increasing passivity of the members, the apparatus became practically the only active element in an increasingly lifeless party. This led to an enormous increase in its power. Apart from this, the evolution of the Weimar Republic towards a restoration of the previous system did not just bring supporters to the KPD: it literally forced these left forces into a social and political ghetto. The Soviet Union appeared to them as a resplendent idol.⁹

My aim was to demonstrate that the common action of these four factors led over the course of a few years to the extreme dependence of the KPD on the Soviet Union: the latter's Stalinist structures were asserted throughout the party, which fell entirely under the domination of the apparatus.

I would now weight these four conditions for Stalinization somewhat differently. In 1969, I put them in the following order: a) the rule of the apparatus as a contemporary phenomenon; b) the structural problems of the KPD; c) the KPD's dependence on Moscow; and d) the

party's situation in Germany. The intention was to 'show that the simultaneous impact of these factors over a period of five years led not just to a rigid discipline and strict centralization, but to bureaucratic degeneration and a drastic degree of domination by the apparatus'. Originally, I gave the first factor excessive weight; in light of documentation now available, it is the third factor that was the main prerequisite for Stalinization. Nevertheless, a different weighting of the prerequisite factors and access to hitherto 'secret' sources have not changed anything with regard to my fundamental position, namely that Stalinization constituted a decisive transformation of the KPD.

The consequences of Stalinization

Over the 1920s, the KPD developed into a party of 'absolutist integration' (to use Sigmund Neumann's typology).¹⁰ This gave rise to totalitarian structures within the organization and the conversion of the movement into a rigid 'order'. Communist 'fighters' in global class warfare were obliged to observe a strict, almost military, discipline. Democratic centralism required that, as loyal soldiers, they consciously and 'voluntarily' subordinate themselves to the leadership of the party.

Communism originally arose as a current within the working-class movement. Accordingly, Stalinism could only establish itself by completely blotting out the democratic traditions it had inherited. This goal was attained, on the one hand, by expelling all critical elements and, on the other, by conducting ideological terrorism within the communist organizations. The KPD leadership thereby succeeded in rigorously implementing the instructions of the Comintern within its ranks. Works of historical research continue to assert – and rightly so – that when 'Stalin triumphed in 1927 [in the USSR] he also brought the Comintern onto its fatal course'.¹¹ For the KPD after 1929, that meant fighting social democrats as the 'principal enemy'.

The August 1931 referendum in Prussia showed how far the KPD leadership was prepared to go in attacking social democracy in practice. The top leaders of the KPD had initially decided against participating in both the plebiscite introduced by the right radical Stahlhelm in February 1931 and in the subsequent referendum organized by the Nazi Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; NSDAP) and the German Nationalists against the Social Democratic government of Otto Braun and Carl Severing in Prussia. On 10 April, *Die Rote Fahne* warned workers not to allow themselves to be seduced into marching 'side by side with the murderous strike-breaking gangs of the Nazis and

the Stahlheim, with the princes of the stock exchange, the Junkers and the inflation profiteers'.¹²

Yet, that is exactly what happened when, in the summer, the KPD suddenly began to support the Nazi referendum. Documents from the communist archives, kept secret until now, provide information on the background to this decision. On 15 July 1931, Heinz Neumann sent a 'letter from the secretariat' to the Comintern proposing 'participation' by the KPD, but not insisting on it. Then, on 20 July 1931, Wilhelm Pieck, the KPD's representative in Moscow, wrote to the party leadership in Berlin:

On the question of participation by the party in the referendum on the dissolution of the Prussian Diet, the leading comrades not only of the Comintern but also of the party are of the unanimous view that the party must participate unconditionally in the voting, in favour naturally of dissolution.¹³

The upshot was that the KPD was obliged to take an active part alongside the NSDAP in the referendum of August 1931.

The KPD's policies were prescribed in Moscow by the Comintern and willingly carried out in Berlin by the party leadership. Stalinization, the complete obliteration of all traces of democracy within the party, made it possible for the KPD to adopt the absurd slogans of this period. Only because of this was the line of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) as the 'main enemy' followed until 1933. Although the KPD was a large organization, no voices were raised in opposition. On 24 November 1931, Wilhelm Pieck made a telephone call to the secretary of the KPD politburo, Leo Flieg, in which he passed on these instructions: 'The SPD remains the main support of the bourgeoisie. Strengthen the fight against the SPD leadership and its policy.'¹⁴ The Comintern leadership in Moscow wrote to the KPD in January 1932, stating: 'A fight against Right opportunists, against the liberal, parliamentary counter-position of Social Democracy and Fascism' is necessary.¹⁵ Such were the burdensome consequences of Stalinization.

Responses to the thesis of Stalinization

Very few objections were raised against my study of the transformation of the KPD when it was published in 1969. While East German historians talked predictably of 'Weber's falsifications',¹⁶ the two volumes

were soon regarded in the West as the standard work on the subject. With the opening of the archives, further evidence has been found in internal party sources, prompting the publication of a range of studies outlining changes in the Comintern and consequent Stalinization.¹⁷ Indeed, the Stalinization thesis has been reinforced by a handbook covering the lives of 1,400 KPD leaders.¹⁸ These biographies provide a personal demonstration that the structures established by Stalin in the CPSU and Comintern, as well as his specific strategies, were imposed on the KPD and its members.

Even so, Michael Mallmann has vehemently contested such a thesis, using a very narrow source base focusing on the Saarland region to make a general case, and in spite of the fact that newly available archives provide even more justification for it.¹⁹ Mallmann confuses several problems, and he fails to draw a clear line between different phases of the KPD's development. Some of his 'discoveries' – for example, that the KPD mobilized a broad stratum of workers – had appeared in my 1969 book. But the rigid centralization which resulted from Stalinization made it impossible for grass-roots units (the base of the KPD) to 'shape policy on the spot according to their own approach'. Still less was it possible, as Mallmann asserts, 'to ignore instructions from higher up'. The waves of expulsions which hit the party show how the post-1929 structure prevented such an unwelcome degree of autonomy. To deny this is not only to present many power mechanisms as ineffective, but also to ignore the documents in the recently opened archives. The new sources show plainly how considerable alterations took place in the structure and personnel of the Comintern in the 1920s over the course of the CPSU's own Stalinization. These changes made the individual sections heavily dependent on Moscow, and they must be characterized, particularly in the case of the KPD, as having transformed the communist party.

Much recent research has concentrated on analysing communist ruling systems. Accordingly, the terror has been the central focus of investigation, and the study of communism as a radical social movement has been forced to a large extent into the background.²⁰ Nevertheless, in order to understand the essence of communism, we have to take into account its history as a radical working-class movement, as well as its ideology and the utopian elements it contains. 'Communism' must, therefore, be subdivided differently. We must distinguish between, on the one hand, communism as part of a social movement which desires to create a better world and, on the other, the communist regimes, which wanted to protect and strengthen the power they had acquired

by all possible means, including terror. This does not, however, change anything in the Stalinization thesis.

The assertion that Stalinization did not in fact take place led, after Mallmann's 1996 study, to debates within a relatively narrow area of research. Since Mallmann did not accompany his 'general attack on Weber's thesis'²¹ with any definite conception of his own, he himself rapidly became the focus of criticism. Andreas Wirsching pointed to Mallmann's 'analytical, methodological and interpretational weaknesses', though he too admitted that he had doubts about the Stalinization thesis.²² Most recently, Florian Wilde's discussion of the relationship between the former leader of the KPD, Ernst Meyer, and intra-party democracy in the years 1921–2, has confirmed once again the postulate of Stalinization, and is supported by empirical investigation. Wilde concludes:

In short, we cannot agree with Mallmann when he writes 'domination by the apparatus was a process which had taken shape long before Stalin' ... It therefore remains impossible to give a conclusive explanation of the striking differences between the degree of internal party democracy and freedom of discussion in the KPD under the leadership of Ernst Meyer ... and the completely anti-democratic position in the Stalinized KPD of the late 1920s and the 1930s without assuming that there was a fundamental change in German communism which first started in the year 1922.²³

Stalinization and the development of German communism

For these reasons, and also because my book *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus* has been out of print for decades (including the pirated extracts), I propose once again to give a short outline of the Stalinization of the KPD in order to clarify the developments of the time.

German communism arose in the First World War as a result of a split in the classical workers' social democratic movement. For decades, different wings of the SPD – reformists, revisionists, orthodox Marxists and the radical Left – had argued furiously with each other, but no tendency wanted to split the organization. The First World War brought about a new situation. A majority of the party supported the policy of the 'defence of the fatherland' and the 'truce on the home front' (*Burgfrieden*). A minority, which grew in strength as the war progressed, opposed this and stuck to traditional internationalist positions. The

split of 1917 and the creation of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; USPD) showed that the issue was not so much a traditional division between right and left as the party's attitude to the war. After all, the war was a catastrophe, not only for the workers' movement but for the whole of society. Brutality and killing were rewarded in this war of the masses. Violence now took on a new value and, when transferred to politics, became a commonplace: the characteristic feature of the twentieth century as a whole. Looking back, we can say that it was the First World War and not the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution which had the most devastating and decisive impact.

For the extreme left, the Bolshevik Revolution became a rallying point in the struggle. Whilst Rosa Luxemburg still rejected some of the Bolsheviks' violent actions and their dictatorial methods, Bolshevism and Soviet Russia quickly prevailed as the idol of the radical left in Germany.

During the Weimar Republic, the KPD formed part of the German workers' movement.²⁴ It was founded at the turn of 1918–19 as a merger between two small groups, the Spartacus League and the International Communists.²⁵ The young party was initially a weak organization, under the leadership of Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (who were both murdered on 15 January 1919) and their successors. It became a mass party at the end of 1920 when it was joined by the left of the USPD.

The history of the KPD took a course which corresponded to the three stages of the Weimar Republic. During the revolutionary post-war phase to 1923, it attempted to take power by carrying out actions and uprisings. In the phase of stabilization from 1924 to 1929, the activities of the KPD were directed above all towards achieving changes in the internal structure of the republic. In the crisis of 1929 onwards, the KPD grew into the third strongest party in Germany. It pursued Stalin's catastrophic ultra-left course against social democracy as the 'main enemy', defamed as 'social fascism', and contributed thereby to the downfall of the Weimar Republic.

The KPD played less of a role in German politics during the period of stabilization between 1924 and 1929 than in the crisis years up to 1923 and between 1929 and 1933. The objective situation did not allow it to pursue a policy of revolution, and acting within the rules of the parliamentary game did not fit in with the party's inclinations. Its goal was, after all, to overthrow parliamentary democracy. Nonetheless, even in the period between 1924 and 1929 the KPD remained a political force

to be reckoned with. With roughly 100,000 members and some three million voters, it was one of the largest parties in Germany at the time.

As long as it existed, German communism was determined by two factors: one was German politics and German reality, the other was the requirements of world communism, the Comintern and, in particular, the needs of the Soviet Union. In a sense, the history of the KPD as a section of the Comintern can only be understood as a part of the Comintern's wider history. A range of documents and numerous investigations have demonstrated both the connections between the Comintern and the KPD and the subordination of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) to the Soviet leadership. Between the two world wars, communist policy was determined from outside national borders by two institutions of the communist movement: the Soviet Union as a communist-ruled state and the Comintern as the worldwide union of all communist parties.

The Comintern and its sections were dependent on Russia's technical and financial assistance. But what the communist parties saw in Soviet Russia was above all an unimpeachable example. This meant an inexorable rise in the ideological, personal and material influence of the Russian communists in the Comintern. The Soviet Union quite openly dictated the course of policy and subordinated all communist parties to its interests (or what it thought was in its interest).

By this time, the Soviet Union and the CPSU were under the domination of a dictator, Stalin, and his *apparatus*. The 'socialism in one country' thesis was intended to provide the ideological underpinning for Soviet hegemony over world communism. The party's 'leading role' continued to be the determining axiom, and the core of the ideology was the assertion that the party was 'always right'. For the KPD, from the mid-1920s onwards, this meant that the leading role of Stalin's CPSU was recognized unconditionally, and both its policies and its organizational structure were uncritically adopted. The composition of the party's personnel underwent far-reaching changes in parallel with this transformation of its structure and function, both as a result of the constant fluctuation in members and functionaries which was typical of the KPD, and through the replacement of leading cadres. The party purges were largely determined by the Comintern.²⁶

The KPD in its early years had three main problems to solve, although at the time they were hardly perceptible. First, it had to clarify its relation to the Soviet Union, in which the decisive element was its degree of dependence on the Soviet state; second, it had to agree its own structure as a party, which raised the question of intra-

party democracy; and third, it had to decide on a policy, the 'general line': was the party to conduct a policy of intransigent ultra-leftism or take a line of pragmatic left opposition to the Weimar Republic and the SPD?

The disagreements within the KPD ultimately turned on the answers to these basic questions. With the Stalinization of the party, each of these problems was rigorously and one-sidedly solved: the KPD became fully dependent on Moscow, democracy within the party was removed and, from 1929 onwards, it steered an ultra-leftist course.

In October 1923, the KPD failed in its final attempt to come to power through an uprising.²⁷ The extreme Stalinization of the party followed this. My present view would be that the failure of the attempted uprising had three general consequences:

1. It sealed the Comintern's domination over the KPD. By 1929, Stalinization had completed the party's total dependence on Moscow.
2. Functionaries and members became unconditionally devoted to the Soviet Union. This process culminated in 1928 after the 'Wittorf Affair'²⁸ with the reinstatement of Ernst Thälmann on Stalin's instructions and the removal of the 'right' and the 'conciliators' from the leadership. This would imply that the thesis according to which there was still an alternative in 1928 is hardly tenable,²⁹ because the Moscow leaders of the Comintern had been able to make its German section more compliant during the fierce factional struggles which began in the KPD in 1925.
3. The 'German October' was an attempted putsch (Paul Levi had described the March Action of 1921 in the same way), the aim of which was to serve the interests of the Soviet Union. This shows that the view that a successful 'German October' would have provided world communism with a democratic face is mistaken. The documents now available confirm that Moscow wanted to extend the reach of its dictatorship and already had the decisive voice. In 1923, the power of the CPSU in the Comintern was already so all-embracing that there was in principle no possibility of altering anything in the fateful development of world communism and the KPD in particular.³⁰

Nevertheless, the KPD did have an important function in the Weimar Republic. The strength of German communism lay 'in its critique of the existing economic and political system' and its resistance to

'possible right radical offensives', as Sigmund Neumann pointed out.³¹ In addition, the KPD was able to mobilize a broad stratum of the working class, it offered a field of political activity to the unskilled workers and, above all, it organized the unemployed. Moreover, as a part of the working-class movement it attracted many people who wanted to fight against the restoration of the former system. Lastly, it achieved remarkable results in the elections, in which it participated from 1920 onwards despite its anti-parliamentarianism. It received over three million votes in the Reichstag elections of 1924 and 1928; in November 1932, with almost six million votes, it became the third biggest German party (behind the NSDAP and the SPD).

The political line of the KPD was full of contradictions: in 1924–25, it steered an ultra-left course under Ruth Fischer, Arkady Maslow, Werner Scholem and Ernst Thälmann; in 1926–27, it conducted a moderate and realistic policy under Ernst Meyer and Thälmann; in 1928, it veered again to an ultra-left position under Thälmann, Hermann Remmele and Heinz Neumann. At every change of course, fierce internal conflicts arose, resulting in the replacement of one set of cadres by another. Each time, the apparatus – which was more than simply the bureaucracy of the organization³² – emerged as the winner.

Stalinization, therefore, did not proceed without serious internal disputes and associated changes in the leadership. Of the 16 top leaders in the 1923–24 politburo (called 'polbüro' in those days), only two remained in 1929 (Thälmann and Remmele). No fewer than 11 had been expelled from the KPD in the intervening period. Similarly, 105 of approximately 250 functionaries holding leadership posts in 1924 either left the party or were expelled over the next five years, and only 95 of the original 250 continued to hold leading positions in the party in 1929. The KPD nominated 484 candidates to stand in the 1924 Reichstag elections; only 42 of these – less than 10 per cent – continued to be put forward in 1930.

As this suggests, the fight against 'left and right deviations' brought about drastic changes in the composition of party's leading bodies. The functionaries who remained, along with the newly promoted representatives now making their careers, underwent re-education and re-orientation along party lines so that they became indoctrinated members of the *apparatus*. The emotional, intellectual and material dependence of the functionaries on the party and the Comintern made it easy to implement a far-reaching degree of Stalinization. Pluralism,

self-reliance, autonomy and freedom of speech were replaced by submission, discipline, obedience and blind faith.

The constant fluctuation in adherents also took its toll. In 1927, only a quarter of party members had belonged since 1920. This meant that only a tenth of the approximately 360,000 members at the end of 1920 (fewer than 40,000) were still in the party seven years later. According to official party data, fluctuation amounted to 38 per cent in 1931 and as much as 54 per cent in 1932.³³ Continuity was also lacking among the party's functionaries. Only 55 out of the 1,300 delegates to a district conference held in Saxony in 1932 had been members of the party since its foundation, while 700 out of 970 delegates to a Berlin conference, also in 1932, had been party members for less than three years.³⁴

At the beginning, different tendencies worked alongside each other in the KPD. This clearly came to the fore in the controversies within the party leadership. In general, there were two basic currents of opinion. The 'realpolitiker' wanted to gain the support of the masses before thinking about seizing power in an uprising and the construction of a new society. They therefore tolerated compromises in the everyday struggle and a united front with the leaders of other workers' organizations. The 'radical leftists', in contrast, rejected all compromise. They strove directly for a revolutionary uprising and a rapid conquest of power.

The realpolitiker accused the representatives of the radical left wing of putschism and utopianism, and fought against them as 'ultra-leftists'. Conversely, the leftists attacked the moderate communists as 'rightists', accusing them of betraying fundamental principles and adopting the positions of social democracy.

A former party functionary analysed these tendencies in the early KPD in 1932, saying that they 'continued to operate'. The 'constant pull towards the left' in the direct action of the party led to isolation; this in turn was corrected by a course to the right, which 'was intended to cancel out' the previous defeat.³⁵ After the Stalinization of the party, this alternation became almost meaningless:

The general line was originally a result of the relative equilibrium between the right and left wings of the party. Once the party ceased to be divided, it rigidified into a conformist, authoritarian organization, entering into ever greater dependence on Moscow's commands. Henceforth changes of course were ordered purely in response to changes in Moscow's interests.³⁶

In the 1920s, the leading communists had coalesced into groups and factions according to their position on the 'left-right spectrum' within the party. Membership of the 'right', the 'conciliators' (centre group), the 'left' or 'ultra-left' not only played a part in numerous expulsions; being ascribed to a particular group or faction also often determined the career of a functionary and, subsequently, her or his fate during the purges of the 1930s.

The left-right schema was highly pronounced among the communists of the Weimar Republic. In the 1920s, struggles within the party were conducted almost exclusively from one point of view. The objective was to attack rival 'left' or 'right' groups, to overcome them and, as far as possible, to oust them from the party's ranks. After the Stalinization of the CPSU, Comintern and KPD, the pace quickened, with the result that 'right' and 'left' deviations from the general line were now denounced as 'anti-party'. Of course, presenting these conflicts as a left/right division was an oversimplification, as the following overview of the different tendencies in the KPD during the 1920s illustrates.³⁷ The 'right', grouped around such leaders as Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer, determined policy between 1921 and 1923. They continued to advocate a united front policy after the October defeat, but lost almost all of their positions in a radicalized German party. Their main supporters were skilled workers, trade union officials and municipal councillors, who maintained the traditions of the pre-war SPD. In 1928–29, their supporters either left the KPD or were expelled from it; 4,000 of them went on to form the Communist Party Opposition (*Kommunistische Partei Opposition*; KPO). The 'centre group' was a product of the party feud over the October defeat. At the beginning of 1924, part of this faction went over to the now dominant 'left', while a grouping under Ernst Meyer remained in opposition to the ultra-left policies of Ruth Fischer. Between 1926 and 1928, they entered the leadership, which was led by the 'pro-Comintern left' under Ernst Thälmann. Although only nuances separated the centre from the right on policy issues, the 'conciliators' – as they were known from 1927 – emphatically supported CPSU hegemony in the Comintern and wanted to stay in the party at any price. Their supporters were predominantly intellectuals and 'professional revolutionaries' who, in 1930, capitulated to the central committee. The left had its origins as a 'left opposition' to the right's domination of the leadership between 1921 and 1923. Under such leaders as Fischer, Maslow and Thälmann, the left was a mix of intellectuals and radical workers who had joined the USPD *en route* to the KPD in 1920. Their main base of support was among radicalized

workers, especially the unemployed. After the Comintern intervened to moderate KPD policy in 1925, the left fragmented. A number of ultra-left groupings were expelled, while the remainder joined the pro-communist left under Thälmann. In the Stalinization of the KPD, the most important prerequisite was the cooperation, and subsequent fusion, between the pro-Comintern left, the 'party specialists' (e.g. parliamentarians, propagandists, editors) and apparatus officials (most notably Walter Ulbricht), who avoided taking sides in factional feuds.

Centralization and the end of democracy within the party

The far-reaching reconstruction of the KPD's organizational structure during the 1920s had several important consequences. It brought about the centralization of the party and a corresponding increase in the powers of the leadership under the direction of the ECCI; stricter guidance of the apparatus from above; the monopolization of opinions by the leadership, using the press and party education; and, not least, the destruction of the factions and the elimination of any kind of legal opposition. As Josef Lenz-Winternitz wrote as early as 1924, 'Leninism is first and foremost iron discipline on the part of the membership, that is to say military centralization'.³⁸

The Comintern demanded that communist parties 'must be built up as organizations absolutely monolithic in attitude and approach'.³⁹ The main intention behind the party inspections (later described as 'general musters')⁴⁰ was to prevent the formation of factions. It became impossible for critical functionaries to form groupings, even loose and informal ones, in opposition to the party line and the party leadership. The organization was also gradually brought into line with Bolshevik ('Leninist') norms in its day-to-day practice. But since the adoption of democratic centralism by the KPD took place almost at the same time as the Stalinization of the party, what was in fact established was an exaggerated bureaucratic centralism.

The elected party committees had few powers. They were at best organs of supervision. The ever-more rigid and bureaucratic management of the organization by the top echelons of the party smothered democratic impulses from below. The influence of the elected functionaries also shrank in proportion to the growing pre-eminence of the paid party officials. From 1926 onwards, the secretariats had the apparatus more tightly in its grip, and it was demanded without hesitation 'that the leading bodies must have greater powers than has so far been the case'.⁴¹ The party leaders viewed the power of the hierarchically

structured authorities to issue orders as a sign of progress. Their goal was to determine the course of the party by themselves, with the help of a disciplined apparatus. It is true that the number of official paid functionaries remained relatively small, but a considerable number of unpaid functionaries worked in party enterprises or had received their employment through party connections, and they thereby became materially dependent on the party. According to the 1927 *Reichskontrolle* (nationwide audit), 2,348 people (almost 2 per cent of roughly 140,000 members) were directly employed by the KPD.⁴² The actual party apparatus (i.e. paid political functionaries) would have comprised 500 people at the time, while most of the party's employees were composed of workers in the KPD's print works and publishing houses, shorthand typists, and so on. A further 3,736 communists worked in consumer co-operatives or Soviet institutions in Germany. Thus, over 5,000 people – approximately 20 per cent of the party's functionaries (counting the total of active communist functionaries as between 20,000 and 30,000)⁴³ – owed their employment directly or indirectly to the party. Most of them were dependent on the KPD leadership and the Comintern.⁴⁴ They dominated party life and, with their help, the people at the top could determine the party's policy and put it into effect. There also existed alongside the party a number of illegal bodies with special functions, such as the M-Apparat for military organization, the Z-Apparat for penetrating the Reichswehr, and the courier service. These were mainly subordinate to the ECCI in Moscow, but their presence also strengthened the tendency in the KPD towards rule by the apparatus. The dependence of the KPD on the Comintern and the CPSU finally had the result that Stalinist organizational practices were uncritically adopted.

The belief that only 'military discipline' could bring victory in the hoped-for revolution played a similar role to the raising of barriers against the democratic SPD. The situation was made worse by conditions in Germany and by the ghetto status of the KPD. In Germany, unlike in Britain, France or Scandinavia, communists were not integrated into society. The persecution of the KPD by the state apparatus of the Weimar Republic probably played an essential role in this failure to integrate.

Hierarchical centralism supplanted the party's traditional democracy. Originally, things were very different. During the factional disputes of 1921 (after the March Action), broad intra-party democracy still prevailed: declarations by oppositionists were printed in the party press as a matter of course; they presented alternative reports to meetings, and so on.⁴⁵ It continued to be possible to do so in 1922 and 1923. Even

after the October 1923 defeat, democracy within the party was reflected in factional arguments: the 'right', the 'centre group' and the 'left' came forward with their own speakers and platforms at all delegate conferences and district party congresses, and the active members of the party were able to express their views. After 1924, the 'left' aimed to liquidate all factions by means of 'Bolshevization'. But it did not succeed, for an ultra-left opposition already existed in 1925 and even the moderate forces in the party worked in a more or less factional way.

By 1926, the disputes had finally escalated to the degree that almost a dozen factions stood in opposition to each other inside and outside the KPD.⁴⁶ The party threatened to disintegrate, which made it easier for the leadership and its apparatus to instil a horror of factional activity among most members and functionaries. They supported the call for a disciplined and monolithic party; a desire for absolute unity based on their shared objective of a radical transformation of society through the overthrow of the democratic republic.

Radicalism, force and Russia

Radicalism was characteristic of the KPD, and I would now be of the opinion that this promoted Stalinization. Conditions in Germany offered a number of reasons for radical action and plenty of opportunities. Radicalism was imprinted on the communist movement from the beginning. The intention was to achieve the goal of a socialist society rapidly by revolutionary and violent means. But Luxemburg had already pointed out at the founding congress of the KPD on 30 December 1918 that such radicalism was unsuitable as a guide to practical politics. In the discussion over whether to participate in elections, she directed this criticism at the majority of the delegates: 'It is my conviction that you are a little too comfortable and too hasty with your radicalism.'⁴⁷

Curt Geyer confirmed, in a 1923 analysis, that supporters could be radicalized in times of crisis, but it was not an instrument for shaping durable policies. Radicalism, he wrote:

emanates from the impatience of the masses, who do not want to wait for the gradual growth of organizations and electoral support or the gradual effects of reforms carried through parliament, but imagine that they can achieve everything the present needs immediately with the force of the will and impetuous violence.

Geyer concluded: 'Radicalism is therefore an extremely unstable movement. It depends on the momentary situation and the mood of the masses'.⁴⁸

A radical, undifferentiated friend-or-foe schema was the dominant model among the followers of communism, particularly after its Stalinization. There was a heightened level of aggression, and organizations like the League of Red Front Fighters (*Rote Frontkämpferbund*), which continued its activities after 1929 despite being banned, demonstrated the militarization of the movement. The communists, who oriented themselves on the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War, glorified violence as a necessary political measure. In the 1918 Spartacus Programme of the KPD Luxemburg had written that the proletarian revolution had no need of terror, it was 'not the desperate attempt of a minority to model the world according to its ideal by force'; at the same time, however, the 'violence of the bourgeois counter-revolution' would have to be resisted by the 'revolutionary violence of the proletariat'.⁴⁹ In 1923, similarly, the KPD proclaimed that it would strike down 'any resistance by the counter-revolution with dictatorial violence'.⁵⁰ Moreover, the Comintern unambiguously supported the use of force. In its 1928 programme, the 'resolute application of force by the proletariat' and the 'violent destruction of bourgeois power' were proclaimed to be necessary.⁵¹ But the communists' relation to violence received a determining imprint not just from the Russian example, but also from their practical experience of revolution in Germany after 1918, the political tumult on the streets after 1930 and, not least, their later brutal suppression by the terror of the National Socialists.

Finally, Stalinization was aggravated by the loss of political autonomy conditioned by the KPD's growing dependence on Moscow. The leading German communists were always fixated on the Soviet Union and, for their cadres, commitment to 'Russia' and devotion to the current leadership of the CPSU was after all axiomatic. As early as December 1924, a KPD newspaper, the Cologne *Sozialistische Republik*, wrote that communists have 'only one fatherland and one native land and that is Soviet Russia'.⁵² *Die Rote Fahne* left no room for misunderstanding in underlining on 28 January 1927 that the 'main task of the Comintern' was 'to support' the Soviet Union. It was clear for Thälmann in 1929 that the KPD needed a 'firm, military' discipline for the 'defence of the Soviet Union'.⁵³

The assertion that the Soviet Union was under threat of war constantly served to mobilize and discipline the party's supporters and also

to criminalize 'deviations'. Indeed, at the twelfth party congress in 1929, Thälmann made a direct connection between the threat of war and his short-lived removal from office in September 1928 by opponents on the 'right' and among the 'conciliators' (in connection with the 'Wittorf affair', involving the embezzlement of funds).⁵⁴ 'Let us take the 26 September 1928', Thälmann said, '[Did] not the class enemy penetrate into our organization, did we not hand over the party temporarily to its opponents?'⁵⁵ The same congress also issued a proclamation apostrophizing the ECCI as the 'general staff of the world revolution' and greeting it with the words: 'Long live the USSR, the fatherland of the proletariat.'⁵⁶ The reply to the opposition was simple: the essential task was to preserve the 'most precious possession' of every communist: the Soviet Union.

The communists' uncritical attitude towards the Soviet Union rapidly led them to subordinate themselves to it and to glorify Stalin. As a Stalinist organization, the KPD also swore by Stalin as a person. Heinz Neumann wrote in the preface to a pamphlet issued in 1930 in praise of Stalin: 'All communists' ought to 'learn from Stalin to be as tenacious as fire, as hard as steel, as bold and victorious as Bolshevism'.⁵⁷

'Military discipline' was created through 'ideological terror', that is to say, any criticism of the Soviet Union, CPSU and, above all, Stalin was regarded as a 'deviation', as counter-revolutionary and anti-working class, as support for the 'imperialist warmongers'. Hence, oppositionists had to be not just expelled but 'eradicated'. Conversely, heightened centralization simultaneously promoted the cult of personality around the 'Führer', Ernst Thälmann.⁵⁸ Indeed, even district leaders (*Bezirksleiter*) were presented as the 'Führer' of their district.

The KPD had to face the dilemma of being a German workers' party while simultaneously representing Soviet interests. There was a further contradiction: as a mass party, the KPD could not limit itself to a revolutionary strategy of verbal radicalism. It was also obliged to engage in practical, day-to-day politics. The KPD repeatedly came up against this discrepancy, particularly during the world economic crisis.

The party leadership sought to reconcile these contradictions by sheer radicalism; refusal to compromise was turned into a political virtue, and the only appropriate demand seemed to be 'all or nothing'. This guaranteed the maintenance of the strict separation from the SPD, the party on which the German communists always concentrated their attention as both rival and opponent. After all, the communists never abandoned their objective of gaining hegemony over the working-class

movement, or of winning the allegiance of the whole working class. On this point, there was absolute unanimity among KPD cadres, irrespective of factional tendency.

Conclusion

Stalinization brought with it a transformation of the internal structure of the KPD, turning a broad internal democracy into a hierarchical dictatorship. It also changed the function of the party, turning a radical German workers' party into an auxiliary force of Stalin's Soviet Union. These structural changes were accompanied by changes in ideology. Ideological justification and concealment replaced efforts to engage in theoretical reflection.

It would therefore be wrong to underestimate the ideological influences which strengthened the political factors favouring Stalinization. The German communists' view of the world imbued them with optimism, giving them the certainty of victory. The 'vanguard' of the proletariat claimed to be in possession of the absolute truth. This led to an elitist arrogance and the loss of a sense of reality. Their 'Marxism-Leninism' rested on oversimplified theses. Stalin's doctrine, as expressed in *On Dialectical and Historical Materialism*,⁵⁹ was primitive but left a powerful imprint on the mind, and it functioned for decades as a kind of pseudo-religion. An initial approach to this already existed with the earlier confession of faith in the 'Leninist view of the world'.

The programmatic decay of German communism was signalled not only by the loss of outstanding personalities, but also by the increasingly shallow set of clichés and dogmas which drove out traditional Marxist ideas. The eradication of the opposition and the consequent rejection of theoretical discussions meant that intellectual mediocrity became dominant among the party leaders and the functionaries who adapted themselves to them.

Independence of thought and creativity disappeared from German communism. As a result, canonical articles of belief reinforced the arrogance of power, which was of course coupled with a widespread mentality of subservience. Not only was it suggested to the cadres that they were a 'vanguard' and an 'élite', but constant training and selective factual information were used to underpin this arrogance and their hierarchically allotted privileges. Continuous courses of indoctrination were intended to leave no room for doubts, scruples or scepticism; the only escape that remained was cynicism. The ideology always served to ensure both deception and self-deception.

Even so, it remained an important instrument of discipline. In Germany, unlike in the Soviet Union, the party leadership was not in a position to enforce Stalinization with police methods. The KPD was a mass party and not a sect, in contrast to quite a few other sections of the Comintern. It was able to develop more or less freely, to operate legally, and it possessed a tradition of internal democracy. Despite this, its nature was successfully and rapidly transformed because of a whole series of factors and motives, such as the apparently unchanged ideology, the continuing revolutionism of the party image, the workers' yearning for social justice and the rapid establishment of a 'better world', the enthusiasm felt for the Russian Bolsheviks, and the disappointment felt over the democratic Weimar Republic. These and many other factors already analysed long ago in *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus* explain the extreme rapidity of the KPD's transformation.

Meanwhile, the absolute control of the Soviet Union over world communism remained decisive for the implementation of Stalinism. Both Soviet material support and the emotional attachment of all communists to their 'fatherland' had as great an impact as the Comintern's multifarious ways of exerting influence. The Soviet Union determined the transformation of German communism but, equally, Stalinization compelled the complete subordination of the party to the commands of Moscow and of Stalin.

There were many determinants of Stalinization: the situation in Germany, the structural problems of the KPD, and the rule of the apparatus as a general phenomenon of the time. While taking all this into account, and having examined all the relevant sources, my view now is that the really decisive criterion for the Stalinization of German communism was the far-reaching dependence of the KPD upon the CPSU, hence, increasingly, on the Soviet dictator, Stalin.

Notes

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- 3 H. Weber, *Der deutsche Kommunismus. Dokumente* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1963).
- 4 H. Weber, *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Eine Dokumentation* (Hanover: Dietz, 1966), p. 19ff.
- 5 Ibid.

- 6 H. Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus. Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, 2 volumes (Frankfurt/M: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969).
- 7 Weber, *Wandlung*, Vol. 1, p. 13.
- 8 Ibid., p. 10; H. Weber, 'Die Stalinisierung der KPD 1924–29', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift, Zeitschrift der Deutschen Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft*, 9, 4 (1968), 519ff.
- 9 Weber, *Wandlung*, Vol. 1, p. 12.
- 10 S. Neumann, *Die deutschen Parteien. Wesen und Wandel nach dem Kriege* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1932).
- 11 M. Hildermeier, *Die Sowjetunion 1917–91* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001), p. 34; L. Luks, *Geschichte Russlands und der Sowjetunion* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2000).
- 12 *Die Rote Fahne*, 10 April 1931.
- 13 Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO), *Z Kommunismus in Deutschland Zentrales Parteiarhiv*, RY II 6/3/219.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 SAPMO, RY II 6/3/230.
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- 21 A. Wirsching in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 45, 3 (1997), 450.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 462ff.
- 23 F. Wilde, "'Diskussionsfreiheit ist innerhalb unserer Partei absolut notwendig". Das Verhältnis des KPD-Vorsitzenden Ernst Meyer zur innerparteilichen Demokratie 1921/22', *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2006), 168ff.
- 24 O. K. Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969); K. Kinner, *Der deutsche Kommunismus* (Berlin: Dietz, 1999), Bd. 1.
- 25 H. Weber (ed.), *Der Gründungsparteitag der KPD. Protokoll und Materialien* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969); and *Die Gründung der KPD. Protokoll und Materialien des Gründungsparteitags* (Berlin: Dietz, 1993).
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- 35 W. Rist, 'Die innere Krise der KPD', *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus*, 3 (March 1932), 145.
- 36 Flechtheim, *Die KPD*, p. 336.
- 37 For a detailed discussion, see Weber, *Wandlung*, Vol. 1, pp. 35–238.
- 38 *Der Funke*, 28 August 1924. In 1928, too, he spoke of 'military discipline' in the party. See *Die Rote Fahne*, 30 December 1928.
- 39 *Die Komintern vor dem 6. Weltkongress* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym Nachfolger), p. 13.
- 40 *Die Rote Fahne*, 3 January 1930. Walter Ulbricht's audit of the KPD bore the headline 'General Muster of Our Party'.
- 41 *Westfälischer Kämpfer*, 30 March 1926.
- 42 *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, 1928, p. 1052.
- 43 Weber, *Wandlung*, Vol. 1, p. 288.
- 44 The proportion was higher in Berlin. According to official data, 572 members were employees of the party in 1927, and 438 were employed in trade unions and cooperatives. This gives a total of 1,010 people, or 7.2 per cent of the membership. See *Bericht BL Berlin-Brandenburg 1927* (Berlin, n.d.), p. 106.
- 45 After the March Action, the party press printed all the opposition's statements, even those in which the leadership was sharply attacked. Thus, 128 oppositional functionaries had a declaration printed in *Die Rote Fahne* on 24 December 1921, which was in effect a factional platform.
- 46 Early in 1927, the left opposition's 'information bulletin' enumerated ten factional groupings inside and outside the KPD. See *Mitteilungsblatt. Linke Opposition der KPD*, 7, 15 (1927).
- 47 Weber (ed.), *Die Gründung*, p. 99.
- 48 C. Geyer, *Der Radikalismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung. Ein soziologischer Versuch* (Jena: Thüringer Verlagsanstalt, 1923), p. 62.
- 49 Weber, *Die Gründung*, pp. 296ff.
- 50 *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des III. (8) Parteitages der KPD (Sektion der Kommunistischen Internationale). Abgehalten in Leipzig vom 28.1. bis 1.2.1923* (Vereinigung Internationaler Verlagsanstalten, 1923), p. 417.

- 51 *Programm der Kommunistischen Internationale. Angenommen vom VI. Weltkongress am 1 September 1928 in Moskau* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, 1928), p. 36.
- 52 *Sozialistische Republik*, 10 December 1924. *Freiheit* had already said this on 19 May 1924.
- 53 *Protokoll. 10. Plenum des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale, Juli 1929* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, n.d. [1929]), p. 560.
- 54 Weber and Bayerlein, *Der Thälmann-Skandal*.
- 55 SAPMO, RY I, 11/26, Bl. 506ff.
- 56 *Protokoll des XII. Parteitags der KPD* (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeiterverlag, 1929), pp. 12 and 28.
- 57 *J. W. Stalin. Vorwort Heinz Neumann* (Hamburg and Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1930), p. 8.
- 58 'Our Führer Speaks Today', announced *Die Rote Fahne* on 12 September 1930, with regard a speech by Thälmann.
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3

Stalinization: Balance Sheet of a Complex Notion

Brigitte Studer

As with the notion of many other themes in history, so things have gone with Stalinization. At first sight, the object of research seems well defined, and the outcome of the process to which the notion refers appears familiar – especially after a good 15 years' access to the Communist International's (Comintern) archives. Does this mean then that the last word has been said on the Stalinization of the Comintern and its national sections? Let us not forget that the use of the term as an analytical concept did not appear until rather late in the literature on communism. Likewise, its use as a descriptor to signify Stalin's mounting influence emerged only in the years around 1968, with the decline of communist parties and the rise in critiques from the New Left. Seeking to ask questions of its own political matrices, if only to establish its distance from them, these critiques from the left nevertheless eschewed the *a priori* conceptions of the dominant anti-communism.

This is not the place to establish or re-establish an account of the etymology.¹ Let us simply keep in mind that political paradigms and partisan perspectives often orient even scholarly representations, though not necessarily more so in this than in any other field of research, whether history, sociology or political science. Critical distance, as we know, is always the fruit of a long labour of objectivization, which is never without its setbacks. If the notions of 'Stalinism' and 'Stalinization' were not formulated at the outset, it was because they suggested a personalization of politics which contemporaries found difficult to credit and which is not unproblematic for researchers too. That said, it remains necessary to register the conceptual and methodological contribution made by these notions. These do not only suggest a choice of periodization. The heuristic differentiation between Leninism and Stalinism also implies a departure from the theoretical model of

totalitarianism. This has a number of advantages.² Without glossing over the comparison of different systems, 'Stalinism' introduces a change of scale as compared with the macro-political emphasis of totalitarian theories. In short, it allows the historicization of the phenomenon and its location within a particular time and place while, at the same time, exploring its gestation, as is underlined by the recognition of process in the notion of 'Stalinization'. Applied to the Comintern and its sections, it also brings into focus the interaction between the national and international. For example, in a classic text like Annie Kriegel's history of the French Communist Party (*Parti communiste français*; PCF), this dimension was singularly absent at the conceptual level and downplayed at the narrative level.³ Of course, Kriegel did not let the existence of the Comintern and later the Cominform pass unnoticed. Nevertheless, she treated it as one of several factors in the functioning of the PCF, and not as an analytical framework. Hermann Weber, therefore, seems to have been the first to have addressed the increasingly unequal relations of the two levels of communist organization, the national and the international, as his basic research problem.

In my opening section, I want to discuss both the advantages and limitations of Weber's model, highlighting certain blind spots and drawing empirically on the French and Swiss cases. I will then introduce other approaches to Stalinization developed in recent years. These stress the cultural, and even the subjective, aspect of the links between the Comintern and its national sections from the point of view of both discourse and practice. Stalinism figures here not only as an historical epoch and political system, but also as representing a social and cultural space.

The Weberian model

For Weber, the Stalinization of the German communist party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) resulted in a transformation of the political objectives and functions of the party. Prior to this, the object had been to 'make the revolution'. Afterwards, the party served the interests of the Soviet Union. In parallel with this, the role of the party changed. By the end of the Stalinization process, it no longer provided a space for democratic deliberation, but followed Moscow's orders – those of the Bolshevik Party which Stalin now dominated. Behind this transformation, Weber identified an internal revision of the party's rules and modes of functioning that might be summarized as its centralization on hierarchical principles to the benefit of its full-

time functionaries. Deprived of any decision-making power, the ordinary members and activists had simply to obey orders from above; hence, Stalinization also signified the domination of the party by the apparatus.⁴ In Weber's historical study of the German case, the process took place between 1924 and 1929 and thereby preceded the period usually associated with Stalin's rise to and hold on power, namely 1929–53. Nevertheless, it was in the Soviet Union that the process originated. More specifically, it was in the struggles within the Bolshevik Party during the course of which Stalin, in Weber's account, established a 'system of the dictatorship of the apparatus' which sounded the death knell for internal party democracy.⁵

Several factors within the KPD favoured such a development. Weber pointed to its lack of political unity; to its political and material dependence on the Comintern, which was to become still more acute; and to its marginality to the political arena of the Weimar Republic. Combined, these factors produced a balance of forces that were extremely unfavourable to the party. Weber's model thus brought together structural and contextual factors that were specific to the German situation; yet it undoubtedly possessed a certain potential for generalization. The KPD was at this time the most powerful communist party in Western Europe and the one on which international communism placed its greatest hopes of a revolutionary breakthrough. Conversely, this itself attracted the attention of the Comintern and Soviet leaders. The growing influence of the Comintern executive, or rather its increasing domination over the national sections, represented a tendency throughout the Comintern. Though local conditions might diverge – and the rhythms of the process vary according to the case – this has been confirmed and reinforced since the opening of the archives.⁶ Here one may note that Weber's model owed a good deal to the theory of the 'iron law of oligarchy' proposed before the First World War by the sociologist Robert Michels.⁷ Michels had posited the tendency to ever-greater autonomy of party leaderships, whose energies were invested above all in maintaining their own power. The forces behind this 'law' were bureaucratization, along with its division of labour and specialization. Other writers, most notably the German sociologist Max Weber and the French political scientist Maurice Duverger, have since upheld this tendency to the bureaucratization of modern political parties.⁸ Nevertheless, Michels' metaphor – for it is neither a scientific nor a juridical law – is not a happy one from the point of view of the social sciences.⁹ Too general and too mechanical, it fails to take sufficient account of historical contingency and contextual

factors. In the Comintern's case more specifically, the ground for the unarguable dispossession of the national sections of a part of their decision-making competence was prepared by what one might, by analogy, call the 'Leninization' of the organization in its earliest years. The 'strictest centralization' and 'iron discipline' that Lenin demanded in his *Left Wing Communism* (1920) were imposed on the communist parties with the '21 conditions' of the same year.¹⁰ Lenin's organizational model of the vanguard party, structured hierarchically on military lines, could carry the day because only the Bolshevik Party could boast a victory in the revolution. However, external factors also played a role: thus the PCF did not at first accept the 17th condition (the designation of communist party), preferring to retain the name 'socialist party', but this position rapidly became untenable as the label was imposed on it by the press.¹¹

From the endorsement of 'Soviet patriotism' and Bolshevization in the early 1920s to the dissolution of the Comintern and beyond, the different stages in the domestication of the communist parties are familiar.¹² None of the major initiatives by the various national communist parties was undertaken against the express views of Moscow; and none, conversely, were taken by the Comintern or Soviet party only on condition of the parties' prior agreement. But with its accentuation of national elements specific to each party, the popular front did raise the question of a relaxation of control – particularly given that the turn approved by the seventh world congress in 1935 was coupled with the reorganization of the Comintern's central apparatus. Did the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) henceforth give more autonomy to its sections as some historians have suggested, in line with the claims made by the Comintern itself? I have argued elsewhere that this was not the case, in the first place because the reorganization of the ECCI clearly represented a centralization of the powers of the apparatus and not the sort of political decentralization that was claimed by the congress.¹³

The change was in keeping with a clear line of development within the Comintern: the closing down of the spaces for collective deliberation. At the end of 1933 there assembled the last extended plenum of the ECCI, which had functioned as a sort of small annual congress. On 21 August 1935 the seventh and last world congress drew to a close. Held annually until 1922, the interval between congresses had gradually increased and seven years elapsed between the sixth and seventh congresses. Taking their place were meetings 'off-stage', ad hoc commissions, the convocation of particular leaders; but, at the same time

as 'public' forums made way for restricted committees, the national leaders summoned to them found themselves isolated in the face of Comintern functionaries and without the opportunity for multiple exchanges with the representatives of other parties. If operational details of political work were less systematically pursued – though the coded telegrams sent out from Moscow show that this was not always the case¹⁴ – this was also because the Comintern's personnel had been greatly reduced by the terror initiated by Stalin in the mid-1930s. Between January 1936 and April 1938, the ECCI party cell lost half its members.¹⁵ On the other hand, the Swiss party demonstrates that the communist parties themselves sought the ECCI's endorsement of any new initiative.¹⁶ Let us not forget that the functions of communist parties had been modified. With the normalization of Soviet external relations, these were generally more useful to it as propaganda tools than as a force for revolution and, following the Second World War, willingly promoted a more positive climate regarding the USSR while any attempt to seize power was discountenanced by Stalin.

It is in this sense that one can speak of Stalinized parties, meaning that the process of Stalinization as modelled by Weber had succeeded. To be sure, its dimensions, forms and rhythms were often specific to the particular case and also depended on its strategic importance for the Comintern and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, even a small party like Switzerland's was visited by around 20 Comintern emissaries and instructors between 1921 and 1939. Both their number and their means of intervention proved particularly significant in the years 1929–32, when the Swiss party was forced to abandon its 'right-wing' positions. This could be described as the intensive phase of the Swiss section's Stalinization, in the sense of the imposition by force of the 'general line' – if necessary by a change of political personnel. Three elements seem decisive to the definition of a Stalinized party:

1. A hierarchy of values which, from the moment the theory of 'socialism in one country' was imposed, put the defence of the Soviet Union first come what may.
2. Support for the Moscow show trials and the Nazi–Soviet pact were notable examples. Acceptance of the leading role of the Soviet communist party, not just for historical reasons, pending the communists' takeover in other countries, but on principle. At certain times, this predominance was taken to great lengths and could embrace tactical decisions and cadre selection, even at the level of local leadership.¹⁷ At others, it was limited to national leaders;¹⁸ but always

it included the main ideological and political orientation of the communist parties.

3. Finally, as a mode of internal functioning, the reduction of the oxymoron 'democratic centralism' to its centralizing dimension only, at the expense of all-party democracy.

The Stalinization narrative provides a plausible interpretation of the history of the Comintern, perhaps even an incontestable one. What one may characterize as 'Stalinization' amounted to a qualitative change in the relations between the International and the national parties: a decisive and irrevocable step, even if its foundations were laid earlier. The opening of the Moscow archives has further underlined its credibility in allowing the reconstruction, often in the smallest detail, of the sometimes brutal interventions of the Comintern in the affairs of its national sections. Should we therefore give credence to the theory of the external determination of communist politics? Did Bolshevism amount to a 'graft' on the national body politic, as proposed by Kriegel?¹⁹

In fact, if Stalinization is a valid interpretation, it is as the outcome of a process rather than its starting point. It can be located within an institutional approach long established in history and political science on which Weber's work was based. It is an approach centred on the organization and its apparatus, on formal proceedings taking precedence over informal ones, and on the sociology of cadres or party activists.²⁰ On the other hand, to interpret the PCF's adherence to the Comintern as no more than a one-sided importation or, to take up Kriegel's medical and/or gardening metaphor, as the transplantation of foreign tissue, is less than convincing from an empirical point of view as well as from an epistemological one.

This brings us to the issues raised by the controversy between Hermann Weber and Klaus-Michael Mallmann regarding the implantation of the KPD.²¹ Behind their conflicting positions lie two contrasting historiographical postures: on the one hand, history viewed 'from above', through the formal proceedings and leading cadres of the party; and, on the other, the history of its grass-roots members who had to apply its directives 'on the ground' while taking account of local conditions. There is consequently an issue of perspective and of scale. However, where both positions hit a brick wall is over the fact that the Comintern and its sections also formed a social milieu. The institutional and the social are not antinomic entities. The institution is not just (in the Comintern's case) a complex and multiform apparatus, but also a form of social organization linking values, norms, models of conduct

and human relations.²² If 'Moscow' provided a landmark, communist organizations and activists alike were confronted with national or local realities, political organizations on the ground, employment structures; and they were necessarily composed of the cadres available to them. Taking up Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot's proposition, one might speak of a 'plurality of worlds of action'.²³

For an analysis of the Comintern and the Stalinization of communist parties, we must therefore conceive of a model of multiple anchorages and contexts rather than of homogeneity or, conversely, of fragmented spheres. In my book on the Swiss party, I suggested thinking of transfers between these different levels passing through four channels: a) common *political* objectives; b) *structural* links across a unified and centralized organization; c) exchanges of *personnel*; and d) *cultural* links through the integration of communists into a global system and specific way of life, following Paul Nizan's comment in *La Conspiration* that 'communism is politics, it is also a lifestyle'.²⁴ The history of communism is essentially a history of transfers, of networks, of interconnections, not only between the Soviet Union and a particular country, or between two or more communist parties, but also – and above all – between men and women. It is a world, like court society, for which it is a case of establishing the 'formula of needs',²⁵ of knowing the manner and degree of the interdependencies which bring people and groups of people together and bind them.

For a socio-cultural history of Stalinism

The multiple renewals of the subject of history – which political historians have tended to take up rather late in the day²⁶ – have proved to be fruitful for the history of Stalinism. For if one was a communist, not only in one's head but also in one's body and one's actions – in Nizan's words, one's way of speaking and of seeing the world – then the historian needs specific tools with which to capture these facets of the communist experience. Stalinism was defined by a certain form of organization, an ideology, a type of politics and political actor, but also by symbolic practices, forms of representation and schemes for interpreting the world. It is therefore important to reflect on the application and uses of the 'linguistic turn', 'cultural turn' or, now, the 'pragmatic turn' for the subject of our study. What was 'sayable' at a particular moment in the Bolshevik party? What types of speaking were formed and institutionalized, structuring Stalinist society or the world communist movement? On what type of classification did the symbolic

order of Stalinism rest? Coming closer to the 'cultural turn', and reconstructive approaches borrowed from historical anthropology, ethno-methodology or from interactionism, to cite just a few, what motivated the historical actors? How did they make sense of the signs and the codes of their environment? Finally, in the pragmatic current inspired by action theory, micro-history, constructivist and interactionist gender analysis, 'praxeological' sociology and the pragmatic analysis of language, sociology or the history of science, it is necessary to locate action within its temporal dimension; that is, to grasp social practices 'in the very process of their being put into effect'.²⁷ If we work on the assumption of the plurality of normative references in any society – a hypothesis which, paradoxically, may be applied to Stalinism not only by virtue of its rapid and frequent shifts in values, but because of its irreducible diversity of collective forms of belonging notwithstanding the pressure to reduce and unify them – our attention turns to the 'devices which allow a regulated negotiation between actors'.²⁸ Such a step may prove particularly insightful for the Comintern, conceived as a crossroads at once between the Soviet Union and the West and between Bolshevism and the residues of social democracy.

In what follows, I shall propose a number of ways of approaching the history of the Comintern from the perspective of a socio-cultural history. The elements involved relate to different empirical levels and rest on a variety of methodological approaches. They do not necessarily fit together neatly; or, rather, it is necessary to problematize their aggregation without abandoning the presupposition of an underlying coherence.

Loyalty and coercion: the Bolshevik model of activism

Communist parties reconfigured political space at the start of the twentieth century, passing from the local and national to the transnational, even the global. Their horizons of action were no longer limited by national frontiers, but freely imagined in global terms. Communist parties as a result were known as the 'French [or Swiss or German] section of the Communist International'. If a compromise was necessary with contemporary realities, it was only meant to be a temporary one. As is well known, however, with the stabilization of the existing bourgeois order from 1921 the perspective of a revolution in Europe receded.²⁹ Far from winding itself up, the Comintern remained in existence despite a loss of members. This was due to its highly structured model of organization and to the vanguard role which it assumed for

itself. This meant holding out as a fortress under siege whatever the cost. Its survival can also be explained by the sort of allegiance which party membership represented and the rewards which this type of activism offered. One may note in the first instance Albert Hirschman's suggestion that political activity can provide its own end and its own reward.³⁰ Communists could derive satisfaction from their inclusion within a community of interests, bound by the solidarity of its members and the hostility of the outside world, as well as by the real or imagined experience of being able to transform the world and shape the course of history.³¹ To join and become active in the party meant acquiring a series of 'remunerations', such as the key to making sense of a world that was otherwise impenetrable. It also meant speaking up for those who usually had no voice, acquiring the ability to identify problems and sharing in the capacity to define the field of politics. As Bernard Pudal has argued, the formation of a communist party seemed to provide an answer to the blind spots of representative democracy in making good the double exclusion of workers. At the same time, these at least seemed (the picture is ambiguous) to be able to take part in the game of representation as much at the level of interests as of delegation.³²

More than this, in another type of representation than that of democratic systems, consciousness (*soznatel'nost'*) distinguished the communist from the mass of workers who had not yet moved beyond a state of spontaneity (*stichijnost'*), whether collectively or individually. Lenin himself had hammered home the point. The achievement of political consciousness and class consciousness – and joining the communist party was a fundamental part of this – legitimized the communist as representative of a working class that could not yet represent itself. Communists derived the strength necessary for their 'historic mission' from their party-mindedness (*partijnost*). Over time, this principle became a dogma. In the 1930s, it served as a slogan learnt by students at the Lenin School: 'Confidence in the party is our best weapon. To destroy it is to destroy oneself'.³³ This allowed the imposition of discipline even where there were differences of opinion. Other principles also helped form the norms governing the comportment of party members, and those brought to light in recent scholarship include 'Bolshevik vigilance', 'rules of conspiracy' and the need to display an attitude of self-criticism.³⁴

Semantic analysis reveals the changing fortunes of these expressions. 'Bolshevik vigilance', for example, was to the fore in the mid-1930s and, more specifically, at the time of the first Moscow show trial in

1936. ‘Conspiracy’ and ‘self-criticism’, though originating earlier, acquired their now thoroughly reconstructed functions of control and (later) repression only in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The unarguable weight of these injunctions in regulating the comportment of party members illustrates the power of discourse.³⁵ Even so, the meaning and still more the use of these phrases in the 1930s underlines the distance separating Bolshevism in its earliest years from Stalinism, appearances of continuity notwithstanding. Put briefly and a little schematically, disregard for the normative injunctions of the system was accorded a polysemous and, above all, unstable significance during the course of the 1930s. Hence, ignoring the rules of secrecy or conspiracy that were meant to protect the party could be taken as the mark of a counter-revolutionary, even a spy. Probably most of the time there was nothing behind such conduct other than simple negligence – and yet was not negligence in the affairs of the party precisely the hallmark of the enemy? From key words such as these, the historian can reconstitute the Stalinist period’s schemata of perception and understanding. It is therefore possible to record how these phrases served to create meaning for historical actors who acted or felt compelled to act – or equally to speak – in accordance with this meaning. To put it in rather general terms, one may thereby reconstruct how Stalinist power could be diffused and enforced, since whoever has the power to name things has power *tout court*.

The model of the Bolshevik Party, hierarchical, centralized and unified both intellectually and in action, combined conditions committing its members to demonstrate loyalty with the possibility of coercion. Max Weber noted that the superiority of those who dominated (*Herrschende*) finally rested on the possibility of using brute force – but only as a last resort.³⁶ This reservation no longer held true of Stalinism once the arbitrariness of the terror hit the Comintern between 1936 and 1938. Until then, however, the exercise of power had been effected by subtler means.

Management of tools of communication and the circulation of information

Numerous writers, notably Moshe Lewin, have noted that the planned society rested on a vast administration whose effectiveness or otherwise need not for the moment detain us.³⁷ The Comintern was not spared this growth of bureaucracy, which to a degree seeped into the national party sections. The multiplication of control functions and

leading organs, and likewise of leading functionaries and administrators, provides concrete evidence of this.³⁸ This bureaucratic apparatus produced a plethora of reports, correspondence and directives – and consequently of knowledge that it was necessary to manage. However, this communicative space was strongly structured. Concerns with effectiveness, administrative rationality and the effects of power were as closely interwoven as in any bureaucratic organization. All the same, there were specificities. Following Lewin's observation that in the Soviet Union politics as the articulation of difference was completely stifled, Yves Cohen has wisely remarked in his study of the system's administrative practices: 'there remained nothing apart from administration, and administration consisted of actively suppressing politics'.³⁹

A second factor was that the Comintern was not a (bureaucratic) organization like all the others. Its members saw themselves as charged with a mission and located their activities within a hostile world against which they had to erect barriers. The organization had to maintain its secrets from the exterior. The existence of departments like the OMS (*Otdel Mezhdunarodnykh Svyazey*, or International Relations Section), which was charged with financial affairs and clandestine activities, was never revealed in public.⁴⁰ However, the border between what was secret and what comprised official information, in the sense that it could be divulged to the outside world, ran within the Comintern itself and was subject to several gradations. That said, archival holdings bear the traces of the progressive contraction of the circulation of information within the international organization.⁴¹ Relying on the Russian party for the setting up of its apparatus on its foundation in 1919, the Comintern was concerned from the beginning to control the flow of documentation. In practice, however, things initially remained relatively lax. A number of attempts at reorganization during the 1920s and 1930s sought to rectify this through the introduction of more precise and restrictive rules concerning the transmission of information. Hence, on Piatnitsky's orders, the regional secretariats which between 1926 and 1935 were responsible for different groups of countries, were no longer authorized, with effect from 1932, to send out their own mail. This had first to be submitted for inspection by the office of the ECCI secretariat. As for correspondence between the national section and its representative in Moscow, with effect from 1936 this had to pass via the responsible secretary of the ECCI. A similar situation obtained at the level of the national parties. An ordinary party member almost never saw an ECCI circular. Instead, Moscow's directives were disseminated at this level in the form of

selected extracts, retranscribed or reformulated, published in the press or distributed in the form of an internal document. From 1932, by order of the political secretariat, each national section even had to name a responsible figure charged with controlling the distribution of documents classified as 'secret'.

It is a very specific type of secret that one finds within the Comintern, one the German sociologist Georg Simmel has described as the 'secret of the initiated'.⁴² It marks out membership of a group and allows one to distinguish those who are not 'in on the secret'. It also operates according to different degrees of initiation into the secret which are subject to the principle of hierarchy. If the secret in the Comintern rested on administrative procedures, it was also a distinctive political tool. Through its effect on the flow of documents, this not only structured the organization as a whole but also its apparatus. It served to constitute partial societies and isolated distinct groups of leaders who alone had access to certain types of document and the information contained in them. In respect of all this, the conclusion with which Hermann Weber completed his study needs to be re-evaluated and completed. If party members were no longer informed of things, if discussions took place behind closed doors with no political stakes involved, if instead there were only squabbles and intrigues, this was certainly one of the *effects* of Stalinization, but also and pre-eminently one of its *means*.⁴³ One could mention other aspects of this, but there is insufficient space to elaborate them here. One, for example, was cadre control: another mechanism linking bureaucratic rationality, the management of human resources and the imposition of discipline, indeed political repression.⁴⁴ There too, however, the perspective of the institution, the party, the apparatus, cannot of itself fully re-create the historical processes surrounding these practices. The functions *discipline* and *punish* and the putting into place of a panoptical dispositive were certainly carried out 'from above'; but they could not have operated without the assistance of those who were its object. It is henceforth necessary to take an interest in both the 'why' and the 'how' of this involvement.

The call to subjectivity and 'work on the self'

The will to unify, and likewise the fact that the cognitive and normative expectations of the communist world were never completely homogenized, are particularly manifest in the encounter between the Soviet party, Comintern and national sections in the international cadres schools, such as the International Lenin School (ILS). It is on the

basis of their archives that historians can reconstitute 'in practice' the adjustments that foreign students had to make to overcome the distance that separated them from Soviet expectations.⁴⁵ That also goes for the game between the institution, with its norms, values and conventions, and the individual actors. Once in Moscow, these actors were confronted with a state of uncertainty and found themselves obliged to modify their strategy in respect of the party. This task was further complicated by the instability of the conventions of the Stalinist party, whose directives and political line were constantly shifting.

Analysing this type of situation, in which actors have to undertake progressive readjustments for given ends within a specific line of development, the historian Bernard Lepetit concluded that they had to choose between defection and imitation. 'None of the actors, each of whom is sure of knowing nothing, can take the risk of believing that others are in the same situation. The only rational conduct is to go by the behaviour of one's neighbours.'⁴⁶ This observation, which refers to the economy when its foundations are shaking, applies only in part to students' experiences at the cadre schools. This is because they found themselves in a context organized with the object of their acquiring new points of reference and satisfactory forms of behaviour. Consequently, they were confronted with tutors and party cadres who did possess forms of knowledge that they had to interiorize. The situation was hence one of structural inequality between these different actors, even given the necessary caveat that the rapidly changing points of reference in the 1930s meant that nothing could truly be taken for granted even in the case of responsible leaders. At the same time, the cadre schools institutionalized a series of social practices that one might compare to supervised tasks conducted as a group and whose purpose was precisely that of adjustment to new norms.

Before outlining these practices, some words are necessary on the normative cadre and its principles of legitimization. With the first Five Year Plan, Stalinism had revived the Bolshevik conception of the human being as a half-finished product – in Trotsky's words, the 'raw material on which the human being must himself work'.⁴⁷ In 1936, one of those responsible for the cultural politics of the Comintern, Alfred Kurella, pointedly expressed this constructivist vision of the human being who was 'at the same time object and subject, creator and creature of himself'.⁴⁸ The new society needed new men (and new women). To achieve this, the communist had to mature both intellectually and morally and develop his knowledge: he had to learn, to educate himself, to develop.⁴⁹ In a word, the party cadres, as a political

vanguard, also had to form a vanguard culturally – except that the model pupil of the cadre schools was directly adapted to the needs of the party. It was a case of becoming a ‘true Bolshevik’, distinguished by an array of positive characteristics, among them, energy, perseverance, initiative, discipline, modesty and the capacity for self-criticism. The cadre schools meant much more than just a political and theoretical formation. Also learnt there were intellectual attitudes, such as a specific relationship to theory necessarily proceeding from practice.⁵⁰ At the same time, one pursued a sort of sentimental (re)education.

It was an onerous programme. Studying political economy was not enough. As the archives show, the students were also supposed to ‘work on the self’ to adjust their ways of seeing and doing to the norms of the ‘true Bolshevik’, and hence of the communist who always followed the party line in the ‘correct manner’. Such an undertaking was all the more difficult given that party directives frequently lacked clarity and there was a constant need to reinterpret them in the light of circumstances. How might one speak of oneself in public in the ‘correct manner’, that is, without transgressing the norm? For communists from outside of Russia, this was a new experience whose rules they had to pick up swiftly. In the words of a German attending the courses at the communist university in September 1934:

All of the school’s sections have been subjected to verification. For this, the commission had our ‘dossier’ at its disposal. Each one compiled a report on his life and party work. Afterwards the leadership and the students were able to put questions, especially when certain matters were not clear. One could also put questions regarding the personal comportment of the student in question, in his studies or in his private life. All the same, for us German comrades it is something very new and even rather difficult to take up a stance on one’s own comportment or one’s own errors. Automatically one asks oneself: has the one putting the questions got something against me? Why is this or the other thing not right? Hence for us it was really useful to observe the Volga German students, for whom the word ‘criticism’ was more familiar. As for me, I wasn’t asked any questions, but all the same I was pleased when I was able to sit down again.⁵¹

The occasions were frequent and varied on which the students had to measure their conformity to the norm and try to cover over the traces in the event of discrepancies. Writing their autobiography was

one of them.⁵² Presenting a 'self-report' (*samootchët*, also called a *rapport de bilan* or self-evaluation) was another. This pedagogical practice is documented from 1933, and was introduced in parallel with the reintroduction of examinations and marks at the start of the 1930s.⁵³ Finally, there were sessions for criticism and self-criticism, whose function and forms evolved over time.⁵⁴ Despite this diversity, common to all of these practices was the challenge thrown down to the individual in the face of the collective, the party, the institution. Our own researches have shown that it was not possible to undergo these trials, as these practices might be described through a pragmatic optic,⁵⁵ without passing through a hermeneutics of the self. To pass these tests, it was necessary to demonstrate that the adjustment had been made in touch with reality. In the example just cited, the example of the Volga Germans served as a point of orientation. This, however, was far from sufficient. In every case, these practices made demands on the actors' ability to recognize the meaning of the normative field of the Stalinist party (not precisely identical with that of their own party); to identify the expectations confronting them and the distance which separated them; and to mobilize their intellectual, theoretical and communicative resources to overcome them. What was therefore at stake was the subjectivity of these individuals.

In all these practices, the student was brought to speak of her- or himself. The object was to demonstrate loyalty to the party and conformity to the model of the 'true Bolshevik'. This proved to be difficult for two reasons. First, as already mentioned, foreign communists had had other experiences and, to some degree at least, referred to other normative frameworks. Subsequently, we know that distrust increased during the 1930s in the Stalinist Soviet Union. Confronted with the crossfire of questions, repeated interrogations and comparisons between different statements preserved in the 'cadre file', the issue was not to get bogged down in contradictions. True knowledge of oneself was therefore indispensable.

It is worth spelling out what we understand by the 'self', or 'subjectivity', and by 'subject'. Starting from the idea that the first two terms refer to the perspective of the person as she or he feels or conceives of her- or himself, and the last to the person as agent, one and the other are the product of social interaction, as much at the level of norms as of practices. The definition proposed by Michel Foucault is thus particularly relevant here. Foucault conceived of two senses of the word 'subject': the 'subject beholden to another by control and dependency, and [the] subject attached to his own identity by the consciousness

and knowledge of self'.⁵⁶ In the case of Stalinism, several recent studies have shown how the authorities interested themselves in subjectivity, notably that of party members or, in the case cited here, the cadre schools.⁵⁷ The communist system, at least in the inter-war period, required 'subjects' who were fully engaged as individuals in the societal project it had undertaken. The practices of self-knowledge can, in my view, be regarded as 'techniques of the self' as understood by Foucault, who wrote of

methods instituted for the knowledge of self ... such as doubtless exist in any civilization ... proposed or prescribed to individuals to fix their identity, uphold it or transform it according to a certain number of goals, and this thanks to relations of mastery of self over self or knowledge of self by self.⁵⁸

The forms proposed by Stalinism were doubtless in large part specific to it – notably because they were set within a context in which the aim was total control of the 'old self' in order to eradicate and replace it with a 'new man' (or 'new woman'). Superimposed on this was a principle of distrust specific to Stalinism, which sought to track down the old in the very least of its psychic hiding places. As Yves Cohen has suggested, the 'me' of the party had to cover over and replace every other 'me'.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The project in the end was doomed to failure. Not because of the factual confirmation brought about by the fall of Soviet communism, and not because – as Sabrina Loriga has suggested – every total institution turns out *in fine* to be porous.⁶⁰ Stalinist practices and techniques of the self require that we take seriously Foucault's reconfiguration of the conceptualization of power. To discipline and punish was not the primary object of these practices, but, on the contrary, this was to educate, forming the ideal citizen-communist with the participation of the subject. Over the years, these two logics interacted until the repressive logic came to dominate. This development – a contingent one – incontestably helps to explain the outcome of the experience, even if the socio-economic context in which it took place was far from irrelevant to it. One may also hypothesize that at the heart of the problem was an ambition, both anthropological and social, to form a human being that was totally coherent, solely focused on the collective

project, and hence rising above the contradictions of any human life – to say nothing of those of society as a whole.

If social scientists and historians have begun revisiting the history of communism/Stalinism as a fundamental dimension of the history of the twentieth century, the object still largely eludes us. As Alain Brossat notes in his essay on Stalinism ‘between history and memory’, one is not too sure what it is that disappeared with the collapse of the USSR.⁶¹ The uniqueness of Stalinism seems accepted. Of what exactly did it consist, however? And how can we grasp the diverse facets of this phenomenon? If communism represented a way of thinking differently about power – assuming this was really the case – what role did Stalinism play in the death of utopia? And if Stalin was also incontestably fastened to the political modernity of western societies, in what was it one of their products and what effect did it have on them? In this sense, Hermann Weber’s notion of Stalinization opened up the analysis of the relations of reciprocal dependence at the level of communist organization. It is a project taken up and developed by subsequent researchers, adding new perspectives and digging more deeply through the layers of a shifting and contradictory reality, but without yet having reached the bottom.

Notes

- 1 A systematic study of the concepts of ‘Stalinism’ and ‘Stalinization’ has yet to be carried out. Some pointers can be found in M. Hildermeier, ‘Interpretationen des Stalinismus’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 264, 3 (1997), 655–74; B. Studer, ‘Totalitarisme et stalinisme’, in M. Dreyfus et al. (eds.), *Le Siècle des communismes* (Paris: Seuil, 2004 edition), pp. 33–63. Also, S. Fitzpatrick, ‘New Perspectives on Stalinism’, *The Russian Review*, 45 (1986), 357–73.
- 2 One may nevertheless note the risk of overestimating the discontinuities of Soviet communism at the expense of its enduring features.
- 3 A. Kriegel (with G. Bourgeois), *Les Communistes français dans leur premier demi-siècle 1920–70* (Paris: Seuil, 1985 edition).
- 4 H. Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus. Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, Vol. 1 (Frankfurt/M: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969), p. 8.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 B. Studer, *Un Parti sous influence. Le Parti communiste, une section du Komintern, 1931 à 1939* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1994); A. Kriegel and S. Courtois, *Eugen Fried. Le grand secret du PCF* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); B. Hoppe, *In Stalins Gefolgschaft. Moskau und die KPD 1928–33* (München: Wissenschaftsverlag, 2007).
- 7 R. Michels, *Political Parties. A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1999 edition).

- 8 M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972 edition); M. Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen, 1954 edition).
- 9 Weber, moreover, is critical regarding Michels; see *Die Wandlung*, pp. 9–10, 293.
- 10 V. I. Lenin, 'Left Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder (London: CPGB, 1928 edition), p. 11.
- 11 C. Pennetier and B. Pudal, 'Le Congrès de Tours aux miroirs autobiographiques', *Le Mouvement social*, 193 (2000), 64.
- 12 Histories of the Comintern even now are hardly legion. Still useful is J. Braunthal, *History of the International, Volume II: 1919–43* (London: Nelson, 1967 edition). Since the opening of the archives, see P. Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste 1919–43* (Paris: Fayard, 1997); K. McDermott and J. Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).
- 13 B. Studer, 'More Autonomy for the National Sections? The Reorganization of the ECCI after the Seventh World Congress', in M. Narinsky and J. Rojahn (eds.), *Centre and Periphery: The History of the Comintern in the Light of New Documents* (Amsterdam: IISH, 1996), pp. 102–13.
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4

The Central Bodies of the Comintern: Stalinization and Changing Social Composition

Peter Huber

From its foundation in 1919 until its dissolution in 1943, the Communist International (Comintern) was in a state of flux.¹ The leitmotifs of its development were the interrelated process of organizational centralization and the elimination of all but the most trusted cadres, which was charged with putting policy into practice. After detailing the organizational development of the Comintern, this chapter offers a prosopographical analysis of 580 leading cadres in terms of age, social origins, education and nationality. Using a chronological framework, which follows the reorientations of the Comintern's general line, it is possible to demonstrate how the mechanisms of Bolshevization and then Stalinization altered the sociology of the leading cadres, from the early prominent role of assimilated Central European Jews and intellectuals to the proletarianization of world communism's public faces and the 'cultural Russification' of Stalin's executors.

The centralization of authority

From the beginning, the Comintern was conceived as a centralized organization. Yet it would be wrong to see this pressure for centralization only on the part of the Russian party. After the disintegration of the Second International at the beginning of the First World War, the dominant view among the western revolutionary tendencies, which after 1919 moved closer to or joined the Comintern, was that the future International must be centralized.² Yet, putting this basic consensus into practice came up against resistance in the years from 1919 until 1923. Various national parties 'ignored' resolutions issued by the two highest organs of the Comintern, the world congress and the

Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) – something that did not go unnoticed in Moscow.³

Such hidden resistance to centralization adopted various forms:

- Critics of the ‘21 conditions’ of entry to the Comintern were tolerated in several parties.
- National party congresses took place before the world congress.
- Delegates travelled to the world congress with tied mandates.
- The national party congress determined who their ECCI representatives were.

These practices ended at the 1922 world congress. Ironically, Hugo Eberlein – who in 1919 had spoken against the foundation of a new International – carried forward this process.⁴ Thus:

- ECCI resolutions reaffirmed as being binding on all member parties.
- National congresses henceforth to be held after the world congress.
- National representatives on the ECCI were to be elected by the world congress.

This early centralization of power limited the influence of the world congresses, which met less and less frequently. Plenary meetings of the ECCI, which generally usurped the role of the world congress, also became less frequent, ceasing altogether in 1933.⁵

In the main, members of the ECCI were active in their own national sections and, consequently, rarely in Moscow. Increasingly, their responsibilities were delegated to the ECCI secretariat, which in 1929 set up an even narrower body, the political commission of the ECCI secretariat. This concentration in the upper echelons was accompanied by the formation of an extensive auxiliary apparatus (departments, national secretariats), which gathered information about the national sections for the attention of the leading organs and, at the same time, was charged with securing the implementation of Comintern resolutions in the various parties. Already in the early years, the usurping of the Comintern’s decision-making role by the Russian party was noted by western party leaders.⁶ Yet in the period 1920–21 it would be wrong to interpret Russian influence as a conscious attempt to subordinate the western parties. Russia, as the country holding the seat of the Comintern, had only a relative majority on the ECCI. But as most western members of the ECCI were infrequently in Moscow, the Russians – in cooperation with exiled party leaders like Béla Kun and

Karl Radek – set the agenda. There is good reason to believe that the Russian members of the ECCI slipped into this role and made a virtue of reality. The reluctance of some western members of the ECCI to stay in Moscow limited its ability to function fully – a situation about which the Russians repeatedly expressed regret.⁷ After Lenin's political departure (1923) and the outbreak of the internal party struggle, Russian influence on the Comintern organs and the fate of the western parties took on a new dimension. The troika formed by Grigori Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Josef Stalin carried the party struggle into the leading organs of the western parties and drew in new, frequently changing, leadership groups, which entered into an alliance with the victorious Russian majority.⁸ Before the opening of the archives, researchers demonstrated how Moscow's interventions decided the leaderships of the national parties. In explanations of why Russian domination was accepted, a major factor was the enormous prestige enjoyed by the Bolsheviks.⁹

In January 1926, the means of exerting Russian influence in the ECCI were restructured. Strategic questions were no longer decided in the politburo of the Russian party, but in the newly formed 'delegation of the RCP [Russian Communist Party]';¹⁰ a body that had its origins in the internal party struggle, enabling the majority to present its views as having unanimous support. Admittedly, its resolutions began with the words 'It is to be proposed to the Presidium of the ECCI', but it took on normative power. This in turn was understood by the representatives of the communist parties in Moscow, whose requests and complaints were directed to the Russian delegation.¹¹

The 'delegation' examined the tasks of the national sections, along with the annual budget of the Comintern, for which its approval was essential. As Osip Piatnitsky was chairman of the ECCI budget commission and a member of the 'delegation', he could effortlessly turn the Russian 'proposals' into Comintern resolutions. In order to isolate Zinoviev, the 'delegation' in November created a 'bureau of the delegation', in which only Stalin, Piatnitsky and Nikolai Bukharin were active. At the ECCI plenum in December 1926, Stalin and Bukharin were granted the authority 'to decide all urgent questions themselves'. The 'delegation' also initiated the formation of new Comintern organs, such as the political secretariat (December 1926), and appointed their personnel.¹² It comes as no surprise that, from 1929, the 'delegation' was, in reality, dissolved into Stalin's secretariat and its meetings held in Stalin's study in the Kremlin. Its protocols, which had hitherto been deposited in the Comintern archive, are missing from the summer of

1930 onwards; it is possible that thereafter the record of Stalin's Comintern policy is located in the inaccessible archive of his secretariat.¹³

Another avenue of exerting Russian influence in the Comintern was the 'special department', which also monitored the Russian party and was penetrated by the Peoples' Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) after its formation in 1934 as successor to the former secret police (Joint State Political Directorate; OGPU). It comprised seven Russians and one Pole, and operated within the Comintern from 1930. At the end of 1932 it became part of the newly founded 'cadres department'.¹⁴ In the autumn of 1931, two further committees within the ECCI apparatus were founded: the 'cadres section of the organizational department' and the 'sub-department for confidential activities'. They were the creation of the Russian party and OGPU, and had the task of scrutinizing thoroughly those working in the ECCI apparatus.¹⁵ A third body, which took on more of a disciplining and 'unmasking' function, was the 'party organization' of the Russian party. Notably, research by Müller and Unfried proves how, in the course of the purges at the end of the 1920s, the ritual of political renunciations was already part of the everyday life of the ECCI and was driven by the 'party organization'.¹⁶

The first political purges of the ECCI apparatus (September 1929) involved only members of the Russian party. Its sanctions were relatively lenient: from the 231 investigated, only seven were expelled and a further 32 received party punishments. The purge of 1933 included for the first time members of the fraternal parties, who remained strongly represented in the ECCI apparatus until 1936. As in 1929, few sanctions were taken against the 457 investigated.¹⁷ However, from the January 1936 plenum of the Russian central committee, the entire ECCI apparatus was in the sights of a criminal investigation. Dmitri Manuilsky conferred with Nikolai Yezhov (a member of the ECCI from 1935) 'so that we could discuss measures which could put a stop to the infiltration of spies and subversives into the territory of the USSR under the guise of political emigrants and members of the brother parties'.¹⁸ Until then, screening had been in the hands of the 'party organization'; in 1936, the main role was shifted to the most hurriedly convened *ad hoc* commissions, which belonged to Jan Anvelt (international control commission), Georgi Alichanov (cadres department) and Mikhail Trilisser (ECCI secretariat). The lists drafted by these organs made recommendations to ECCI staff ('dismiss', 'remove', 'screen more thoroughly') and were circulated to the ECCI secretaries Manuilsky and Georgi Dimitrov (Palmiro Togliatti was mostly in Spain) who in turn added comments before copies of the lists were passed to the NKVD.¹⁹

The contours of change: 580 of the Comintern's leading cadres

As we have seen, authority in the Comintern became concentrated in the Russian party and its secret police. Using the details of 580 known members of the Comintern apparatus, the following section offers a prosopographical analysis of the impact of Bolshevization and Stalinization in terms of age, social origins, education and nationality.

Social background

First, the social origins of the Comintern cadres (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Social origins of Comintern cadres²⁰

Workers and artisans	38.7 per cent
Farmers	12.8 per cent
White-collar public employees and civil servants (teachers, engineers, policemen)	14.3 per cent
Lower middle class (small traders, doctors, notaries, clergy, etc.)	29.1 per cent
Upper middle class (businessmen, bankers) and aristocrats	5.1 per cent

The proportion of those who came from a worker's or artisan's milieu is high (38.7 per cent), yet lower than might have been expected for a radical 'international workers' party'. Comparable data on the leadership of the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) indicate that – in this case at least – the national communist elite had a higher proportion of those whose social origins were in workers' circles than the Comintern leadership. Almost 50 per cent of the German cadres came from a worker's background, and an additional 11 per cent from artisan families.²¹

An astonishingly high proportion of the Comintern elite came from lower middle-class and white-collar families: taken together, these categories amount to 43.4 per cent, which clearly exceeds the bloc of workers and artisans. Those in the category 'white-collar public employees and civil servants' (14.3 per cent) included 5.5 per cent of Comintern cadres whose families were teachers. Those in the category 'lower middle class' included 3.4 per cent of families from a religious background (pastors, mullahs, rabbis).

Behind the mere 5.1 per cent of cadres from the affluent bourgeois and aristocracy were large regional differences. Communist parties from very poor, rural societies of the later 'third world' had in their leaderships a high proportion of cadres 'from the best families', who put themselves at the service of the uneducated social classes who were at the mercy of local potentates. Two of the five members of the Brazilian leadership in the Comintern came from the highest social class.²² Similarly, four of the 23 leading Chinese cadres in the Comintern (17.4 per cent) came from affluent mandarin and land-owning families.

Training and education

The lowest level of education includes cadres without any professional training, who had received the minimum compulsory national level of education (primary and, quite often, secondary schooling). The following two levels corresponded to the category 'mid-level education' as used to fill in the 'Anketas' (sociological questionnaires) by Comintern cadres. These categorizations were used in distinction to cadres with a broad basic education, which varied from country to country. Higher education includes only cadres who had completed at least one term at a university or a polytechnic. (Table 4.2.)

Table 4.2 Training and education of communist cadres²³

Elementary (primary and secondary school)	17.5 per cent
Vocational (industrial, commercial, technical)	21.6 per cent
Mid-level schooling (grammar, teacher training, commercial college)	16.6 per cent
Higher education (university, polytechnic)	44.3 per cent

The very high proportion of university undergraduates (44.3 per cent) is very marked, far exceeding those in the national party elites and party memberships. Of KPD members, a mere 1 per cent had been to university; from the extended KPD leadership (504 cadres) the figure was 10 per cent; from the inner leadership (politburo, 59 leading officials) 20 per cent had been to university. Harvey Klehr calculated the proportion of central committee members of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) with a university education at 32.1 per cent.²⁴ A clear majority of the leading cadres of the Comintern had thus taken a university course or comparable professional training.

A large percentage of those with an extended or higher education had, however, not graduated. During their education they had been drawn into the whirlpool of political activism, disrupted their studies and devoted themselves to party politics.²⁵ The Finnish communist Mauno Heimo and the Hungarian Zoltán Szántó are examples of Comintern cadres who sacrificed their studies and their professional careers to party activism and, after the defeat of the revolution in their own countries, saw the only remaining psychological solution as loyalty to the party and the Soviet Union.

The impressive proportion of former university students should not disguise the fact that the Comintern also gave party activists with low-level education the chance of advancement. Every sixth cadre (17.53 per cent) had only a basic schooling and had not taken up any professional education. Among them were autodidacts who learnt their 'political trade' in the communist movement and the Comintern apparatus. Grigorij Moiseevic Geris, who had emigrated to the US around the turn of the century, began at the bottom with only six years of schooling. He worked in Philadelphia textile factories, later in a telegraph office, and finally as a clerk. On joining the CPUSA he became head of the literature department, but was deported in 1921 as an 'undesirable element'. Back in Russia, Geris advanced through the Comintern publishing department to become the long-serving head of the bureau of the ECCI secretariat (1931–37), only to end up in front of an NKVD firing squad during the Yezhov years.²⁶ Thorez was also an autodidact with the lowest level of schooling, who from the age of 12 worked as a labourer, bell-boy and bread delivery boy before the French Communist Party (*Partei communiste français*; PCF) made him a full-time party worker in 1924 and, from 1928, delegated him into the highest committee of the Comintern.²⁷

The question of the proportion of 'intellectuals' and workers in the apparatus of the communist parties and the Comintern has repeatedly given rise to speculation. Lazitch and Drachkovitch characterized the era when Zinoviev was head of the Comintern as a turning point in the sociological composition of the Comintern, as 'the professional revolutionaries from Lenin's time' were 'gradually replaced by professional bureaucrats'.²⁸ On the other hand, E. H. Carr dated the change from 1929 and interpreted it as the result of the left orientation of the Comintern, which was a reaction to the destabilization caused by dissident intellectuals in the national parties. From then on, the determining criteria were 'those of rapid and reliable subordination to Moscow's directives'.²⁹ Aldo Agosti, on the other hand, warns against a schemat-

ization of a process which on closer inspection 'was played out in a more differentiated manner and not with the same speed and with the same thoroughness' in the various national parties. In the KPD, the originally high proportion of intellectuals in the central committee fell noticeably in the phases of 'Bolshevization' (1924–25) and more clearly in the 'third period' (1928–34). Yet, in the Italian party, this process began in 1931 when the new central committee comprised only 26.3 per cent of intellectuals against 57.9 per cent workers.³⁰

Table 4.3 gives an overview of the decline in intellectual cadres in the Comintern apparatus (1920–37).

Table 4.3 Intellectual cadres in the Comintern apparatus

1920	63.79 per cent
1923	56.71 per cent
1925	52.41 per cent
1927	47.32 per cent
1930	45.45 per cent
1934	39.20 per cent
1937	37.32 per cent
Average, 1920–37	44.31 per cent

From the outset, the proportion of intellectuals was in steady decline. This was especially clear at the beginning of the 1920s and in the early 1930s. In the years 1919–20, the Comintern was largely a propaganda club comprising those intellectuals leaving or being expelled from social democratic parties, while the 'battalions of workers' remained in them or were involved in bringing about their unification with weak communist parties. The early departure of intellectuals and their replacement by workers had begun before the years of Bolshevization. Some intellectuals, like Paul Levi and Angelica Balabanova, turned their backs on the Comintern out of political disillusionment; others with similarly high degrees of education put themselves at the service of revolutionary Russia. Many Bolshevik intellectuals were moved sideways into the apparatus of the party and state. Notably, Georgi Chicherin, Vaclav Vorovskij, Lev Karachan and Maxim Litvinov were transferred from the early leadership of the Comintern into the peoples' commissariat for foreign affairs.³¹ The years of Bolshevization, with the reorganization of the parties on the basis of factory cells, reduced further the proportion of intellectuals – although not on the same scale as the bloodletting of 1920–21. Leading cadres of the years

1923–24 with a university education were ousted from their positions in the years 1924–25, and were moved to less sensitive posts. Among the most prominent of them were Carl Höglund, Bretislav Hula, Edwin Hoernle, Karl Radek, Amédée Dunois, Jean Duret and Israel Amter. Only in a few cases did expulsions and resignations follow. Most contented themselves with lesser party responsibilities and were, after some time in ‘political quarantine’, potentially able to be promoted again to leading functions. The Stalinist system functioned on the basis of the excluded having the opportunity to work their way back into the citadel.³² The third period, with the elimination of ‘conciliators’ and the enlisting of ‘workers from the bench’, saw the proportion of intellectuals fall to 39.2 per cent. Together with known names associated with Bukharin (Jules Humbert-Droz, Angelo Tasca, M. N. Roy, Sima Marković), those removed from leading committees or expelled from the party included the Americans Jay Lovestone and Benjamin Gitlow and the Canadian Maurice Spector. The turn to the popular front and the ‘year of terror’ (1937) brought the proportion of intellectuals to its nadir (37.32 per cent). Yet, when looked at more closely, it is noticeable that the colonial and half-colonial world continued to send former students into the leading structures, while the parties in Europe and North America had only a low proportion of intellectuals in Moscow. We have already observed a similar phenomenon with the social origins (family home) of Comintern cadres. Thus, the number of former university students among Comintern cadres is shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Former university students among Comintern cadres in 1937³³

China	7 (out of 9)
Brazil	2 (out of 3)
Argentina	3 (out of 4)
Germany	1 (out of 8)
France	2 (out of 8)
Britain	2 (out of 7)
Spain	0 (out of 2)
United States	2 (out of 8)

Regional differences apart, the proportion of intellectuals steadily declined while the proportion of those with a basic formal education and vocational training rose. The ‘proletarianization’ of the leadership structures, which the Comintern pursued, is charted in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Workers in the leading committees of the Comintern (1920–37)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Basic Education</i>	<i>Vocational Training</i>	<i>Total</i>
1920	3.44 per cent	15.51 per cent	18.95 per cent
1923	7.46 per cent	20.89 per cent	28.35 per cent
1925	12.90 per cent	23.38 per cent	36.28 per cent
1927	13.39 per cent	25.00 per cent	38.39 per cent
1930	17.35 per cent	23.14 per cent	40.49 per cent
1934	15.20 per cent	28.00 per cent	43.20 per cent
1937	25.35 per cent	22.53 per cent	47.88 per cent

In 1934, the proportion of ‘workers’ was, for the first time, higher than that of intellectuals. The proportion of those leading cadres who had no vocational training of any sort before joining the Comintern (basic schooling only) was minimal in the founding phase of the Comintern (3.44 per cent) and first rose in the train of Bolshevization to around 13 per cent, before finally reaching its highpoint of over 25 per cent at the peak of the terror.

The fact that the Stalinization of the Comintern entailed the ousting of intellectuals and their replacement by those with minimal education does not mean that comrades of a similarly low level drove forward the process. Admittedly, the French, British and German parties were headed – from the third period at the latest – by men with basic schooling (Maurice Thorez, Harry Pollitt and Ernst Thälmann). Yet, they were arguably tied into collectives in which intellectual cadres set the tone and determined how to put Moscow’s line into practice. The Slovak Jenö Fried, the great expert on the French Revolution, acted in close cooperation with Manuilsky from 1931 to 1939 to steer the fate of the French party around Thorez.³⁴ A further example of the central supporting role of intellectual leadership cadres in the steering of ‘proletarian leadership teams’ in the implementation of the Stalinist line is the role of the Hungarian Andor Berei, who from 1935 coached the Belgian leaders Joseph Jacquemotte and Xavier Relecom.³⁵

Nationality and ethnicity

There was always speculation about the ‘Russification’ of the Comintern apparatus. This view was advanced by Humbert-Droz in his memoirs, in which he described how, around the turn of 1928–29, he remained at the head of the Latin American Secretariat but was ‘flanked by two Russians [Petrovsky and Gusev] of the majority line’.³⁶ However, Russification was more of a cultural phenomenon than a

question of nationality and was marked by western parties (and the Comintern) adopting a 'Russian way of operating'. This, for example, included the period of Bolshevization when the alleged remnants of social democracy were to be expunged from communist parties.³⁷ A similar process of identity formation also applied to the large numbers of assimilated Jewish cadres who, especially in the years before 1923, were prominent in leading positions. For them, Bolshevism was perceived as a vehicle for achieving emancipation (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Proportion of cadres of Jewish descent in leading Comintern positions

1919	27.3 per cent	6 out of 22
1923	34.8 per cent	24 out of 69
1929	18.4 per cent	28 out of 152
1935	17.0 per cent	32 out of 188
1941	12.7 per cent	12 out of 94

When we speak below of Russification in the calculation of nationalities in the leadership apparatus, we refer only to the numerical increase of leadership cadres in the Comintern from the territory of Soviet Union. A strong minority of Comintern cadres included those born in central and eastern European and the Baltic states, who were politicized after the First World War within the framework of newly created states. When they took on functions in the apparatus, they could be classified according to these various nationalities. However, we have decided that what is decisive in the allocation of the nationality of these minority groups is not place of birth, but the country of their socialization and politicization, i.e. roughly comprising the years between the ages of 10 and 20 (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Proportion of countries in the leadership cadres (1919–43)³⁸

Russian/Soviet	19.9 per cent
German	8.7 per cent
French	5.7 per cent
Czech	5.2 per cent
Polish/American	4.9 per cent
Italian/Chinese	4.0 per cent
British	3.8 per cent
Hungarian	3.1 per cent
Yugoslav/Spanish/Bulgarian	2.1 per cent
Lithuanian/Austrian	1.9 per cent

Cadres of Soviet extraction admittedly formed the largest bloc, yet this was far from numerical dominance. However, if we look at the entire apparatus (and not only the 'meetings between leaders'), the proportion of Russians/Soviets is considerably higher. As the Soviet Union was the host country of the Comintern, its nationals made up the overwhelming proportion of technical staff, above all in the ECCI's administrative department (charged with finding housing for Comintern staff, buying furniture, preparing salaries, and so on) and the international liaison department (OMS) apparatus in Moscow. Thus, the figure for 1926 would be 45.5 per cent Soviet Russians working in the apparatus and, for the year 1933, as much as 47.3 per cent.³⁹ The only period in which there was an actual Soviet Russian majority among leading Comintern cadres was in the first two or three years of its existence. The proportion of Soviet representatives fell successively, from the high point of 1919 (45 per cent) to the low point of the 1937 (14 per cent) during the terror (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Increasing/decreasing proportions of countries in the leadership cadres

	1920	1922	1926	1932	1937	1939
Soviet	40 %	23 %	22 %	16 %	14 %	15 %
German	8 %	9 %	12 %	12 %	5 %	5 %
French	2 %	7 %	7 %	5 %	5 %	8 %
Czech	2 %	6 %	7 %	8 %	6 %	9 %
Polish	3 %	4 %	6 %	7 %	7 %	
American		3 %	4 %	5 %	6 %	5 %
Italian	5 %	5 %	5 %	4 %	3 %	5 %
British	2 %	2 %	4 %	6 %	5 %	6 %
Hungarian		4 %	4 %	5 %	4 %	6 %
Chinese				3 %	6 %	6 %
Latvian	8 %	3 %		3 %		
Bulgarian			2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %
Spanish						4 %

The initial predominance of Soviet Russians and cadres from the Baltic republics was a thorn in the side of the Comintern, which – as an organization working towards a revolutionary breakthrough in the West – wanted to show an international face. Thus, during the years of the Comintern's construction (1921–23) there was no shortage of Comintern appeals for member parties to send capable cadres to Moscow. Among the earliest to come were cadres from Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Poland, countries in which the basis for democratic political struggle had been constrained, if it existed at all.

These stateless persons, who had nowhere else to flee, came to Moscow, where they took Soviet citizenship and gave their loyalty to the Soviet leadership.

The falling percentage of cadres from the Soviet Union was only partly offset by this influx of loyal 'refugees from dictatorship'. In the mid-1920s, up-and-coming young cadres from the West entered the leadership apparatus, serving as enthusiastic supporters, even outriders, of 'Russian methods'. Among this cohort were the 'agents' of Stalinism, including Heinz Neumann (Germany), William Rust (Britain) and Henri Barbé (France). From 1927, they helped to eliminate the remnants of any culture of discussion, replacing it with intrigue, slander and the role of cliques as it was masterfully practised by the circle around Stalin in the Russian party.⁴⁰ What was seen as Russian predominance was, in fact, an 'informal coalition' of Russians/Soviets and political refugees on the one hand, and the younger generation of cadres from the West on the other. It should also be noted that from the late 1920s there was a relative increase in the number of cadres from Latin America and China based in Moscow.⁴¹

From 1919, the German communists took a central place in the revolutionary aspirations of the Comintern and occupied important positions in the leadership. Until 1933, in percentage terms, they were unquestionably second only to the Soviet Russians. However, the party's decimation in 1933 dealt a heavy blow to its prestige. Past resentments led to its being labelled the 'party of defeat' and its leaders were derided as 'loudmouths'.⁴² Partly as a result, German representation in the Comintern fell. In 1936, there were as many Poles and Czechs among the leadership cadres; in 1937, the Germans were even outstripped by the presence of North American communists. In place of the predominance of Soviet and German leading cadres during the 1920s, the popular front strategy (1935–39) saw a more balanced national distribution. Other events also took their toll. The Great Terror and then the Nazi–Soviet pact decimated the Polish–Baltic contingent in the Comintern leadership, facilitating a further increase in the proportion of French, Czechoslovak and Spanish cadres, even at a time when the popular front strategy had failed.

The innermost circle

The innermost circle comprised 109 individuals, with a strongly international composition, who belonged to the leading bodies of the Comintern. Importantly, however, the continuous process of centralization ensured that even many of these positions were largely for

show and often filled with marginal figures whose role was short-lived. For example, ten of the inner circle came from the British party and, with the exception of J. T. Murphy, their periods of active engagement in Moscow were brief. The two Finnish leading cadres (Otto Kuusinen and Heimo), on the other hand, were political refugees who had fled to the Soviet Union and spent years in leading Comintern positions, where they accumulated more 'leadership years' than the ten Britons in total. Reference to continuity qualifies the impact of the indicator 'number of uppermost cadres'. Thus, a leading cadre like Manuilsky, who belonged to the innermost circle from 1926 onwards, certainly put his stamp on Comintern policy more firmly than Aitken Ferguson, who was a member of the organizational bureau and the ECCI secretariat for only a few months in 1926.

As a criterion for *continuity in the 1920s*, we regard it as a precondition that they worked for at least three years in a structure within the narrowest leadership (Table 4.9):

Table 4.9 Cadres continuity in the 1920s

[illegible]

In the first two years of the Comintern, there was no continuity at all. Six ECCI secretaries succeeded each other in rapid succession as one after another was transferred into the various peoples' commissariats. Only Radek survived, though not in the innermost circle. Acting within the ECCI presidium, he mentored the KPD and, until 1923, influenced the Comintern's most important section.⁴³ The overwhelming majority of cadres in the innermost circle spent only a year or two working in the apparatus.

Those with three and more years in the apparatus were very much the exception. For the 1920s, let us take nine individuals who shaped the fate of the Comintern in its highest committees. Above all, the first five (Kuusinen, Humbert-Droz, Matyas Rákosi, Piatnitsky, Vasil Kolarov) were the actual backbone of this period, while the other four (Jozef Unslicht, Richard Schüller, Fedor Raskolnikov, Clara Zetkin) covered more secondary aspects of Comintern work.⁴⁴ The Finn Kuusinen had fled to revolutionary Russia in 1918 and is perhaps the prototype of the 'Sovietized' Comintern cadre. He survived – indeed implemented – all of the political changes at the highest level and became himself *Homo Sovieticus*. In 1941, he entered the central committee of the Russian party and, in 1952, was promoted to its politburo. Humbert-Droz, on the other hand, was removed from the leadership despite eight years' loyal work in the apparatus; his 'crime' was to oppose the ending of the culture of discussion in the decision-making process in 1928–29.⁴⁵ The Hungarian Rákosi, like Kun, was a 'defeated revolutionary'; an exile who compensated for the revolution's failure in his own country with outright sectarianism. The Lithuanian Piatnitsky, who headed the small commission of the political secretariat, took decisions on 'questions of an absolutely confidential character' and, until 1935, symbolized the continuity of the Comintern's technical-conspiratorial staff.⁴⁶ In 1926, eight new cadres were promoted; until 1929, and in some cases for much longer, they were to determine the fate of the Comintern. These new appointments marked a turning point, a changing of the guard in the leading committees, which took place in the context of the elimination of supporters of Zinoviev. The sixth and, above all, seventh ECCI plenum (December 1926) saw the appointment of five heavy-weight Soviet members – Viacheslav Molotov (a key member of the Stalin faction), Manuilsky, Solomon Lozovsky, Boris Vasiliev and Bukharin.⁴⁷

The role of Stalin in the Comintern has received scant attention in the literature. He was not elected onto the ECCI and its presidium until 1924, when these bodies took on an increasingly decorative

character. It was for this reason that he exercised influence through the increasingly authoritative 'Russian delegation', which supervised the role of the Comintern chairman, Zinoviev, during the factional struggle in the Russian party. New research has demonstrated how the bureau of this organization, which had Stalin as its head, undertook minute preparations for the ECCI plenums and the world congress of 1928.⁴⁸ With the imposition of Stalin's absolute power in the Russian party, this disguised form of exercising power in the Comintern became superfluous. On 21 January 1931, the Russian party adopted the resolution: 'In order to strengthen the everyday contact of the leading personnel of the ECCI with the work of the RCP, it is regarded as necessary that comrade Manuilsky – and in the event of his absence, comrade Piatnitsky – is present at all meetings of the politburo'.⁴⁹ Together with Manuilsky and Piatnitsky, for the period from 1926 into the 1930s, Vasiliev and Heimo must be mentioned. Both, like Piatnitsky, preferred to work behind the scenes; they were involved in technical-administrative activities. Heimo, a Finn who had been Sovietized in 1919, headed the bureau of the ECCI secretariat (1926–31); Vasiliev headed the permanent commission of the ECCI secretariat (1926–34), which concerned itself with personnel questions and was dominated by Russian – or Sovietized – cadres. Others promoted in 1926 who had a significant degree of continuity were eliminated in 1929 along with Bukharin. Molotov replaced the fallen Bukharin at the head of the Comintern but, in December 1930, was again withdrawn in order to climb to the top of the Soviet government as chairman of the council of peoples' commissars – a career whose short grip on the Comintern also illustrates the complete subordination of the Comintern to the cadres policy of the Russian party (Table 4.10).⁵⁰

Of the four lines of continuity from the 1920s into the 1930s (Kuusinen, Manuilsky, Piatnitsky, Lozovsky), those of Piatnitsky and Lozovsky were broken in 1935. Both had expressed reservations about the turn to the popular front policy as determined by Dimitrov and Stalin. This should come as no surprise: the personnel trusted to implement Comintern policy were also determined by the Soviet politburo. Tellingly, at the seventh world congress of the Comintern, the following resolution proposed by the Soviet politburo was adopted: 'According to the declaration by Comrades Dimitrov and Manuilsky, which has Comrade Stalin's support, [they are] no longer to be able to work together with Comrade Piatnitsky in the leading organs of the Comintern, [and] consider it appropriate that Comrade Piatnitsky

Table 4.10 Cadres with continuity in the 1930s

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941
Kuusinen ⁵¹											
Manuilsky											
Piatnitsky											
Lozovsky											
Togliatti											
Pieck											
Thorez											
Pollitt											
Knorin											
Leszczynski											
Chemodanov											
Thälmann ⁵²											
Florin ⁵³											
Wang-Ming											
Geris											
Dimitrov											
Gottwald											
Marty											
Trilisser											
Ibarruri											

hand over his work to them'.⁵⁴ Among those carrying power at the head of the Comintern, Manuilsky had a first-rank role. Like no other, after the elimination of Bukharin (1930) and Piatnitsky (1935), he embodied the last continuity and intimate knowledge of the power structures of the Comintern. The meteoric rise of Dimitrov in the years 1934–35 did not come at his expense. While Dimitrov was more concerned with representing the Comintern outwardly and holding the member parties politically and organizationally to the course, Manuilsky in the Comintern headquarters connected the apparatus with Soviet structures. To the western party leaders he appeared as anything but a sinister, reserved, even underhand Russian figure, as anti-communist propaganda caricatured Russian revolutionaries. Rather, Manuilsky, like many other leading figures, fettered western communists through his worldliness, wit and joviality, which enabled him to bring the zigzag Russian course to these men.⁵⁵

The formal lines of continuity of Thorez, Pollitt, Wilhelm Knorin, Julian Leszczyński and Vasili Chemodanov were also broken off in 1935, but had an entirely different significance. Thorez and Pollitt were already functioning primarily as national political figures in their own countries: their responsibilities were largely unaffected by the formal change in status.⁵⁶ The Russians and Poles (Knorin, Leszczyński and Chemodanov) had to give ground because they were too closely associated with the old course and, in the eyes of the protagonists of the popular front, could not be relied on to jump on board the new political train. From 1931, Wilhelm Pieck and Togliatti achieved an unusual degree of continuity. They had from the outset supported the change of policy pursued by Dimitrov in the apparatus, during the course of which Togliatti, despite a lengthy absence during the Spanish Civil War, was able to extend his authority in the Comintern apparatus. Pieck, on the other hand, was devastated by the impact of 1933. In the 'year of terror', he was on the defensive as the representative of the worn-down KPD. Notably, since 1935, Togliatti had taken on responsibility for the once-mighty KPD and, after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, was a member of the ECCI troika, together with Dimitrov and Manuilsky. Pieck, by contrast, had to concern himself with the predilections of the Baltic countries.⁵⁷ Togliatti's continuity and determining influence extended back to the 1920s. Already in 1926–27, he was one of the political secretaries of the ECCI, a leadership role in Moscow which was only interrupted from 1928 until 1930 by his stay in Paris as head of the exiled Italian party leadership.⁵⁸ In terms of formal education, Togliatti is typical of the cadres of the 1920s. The leading cadres of the innermost circle with continuity in the 1930s – with the exception of those from 'third world' countries – did not have a university education. In the innermost circle, too, the decline in those with a university education came with an increase in those from proletarian backgrounds. The ten ECCI secretaries, who together led the reconstructed ECCI secretariat after 1935, came almost exclusively from proletarian families (workers, peasants). The exceptions here too were the 'old' cadres with continuity going back to the 1920s: Manuilsky grew up in a lower middle-class family (clerical), and Togliatti in a family of public employees (teaching).

Conclusion

As we have seen, a prosopographical study of the Comintern cadres allows us to identify the changing sociology of the leadership grouping,

which becomes particularly marked in the process of Stalinization. This can be illustrated within a chronological framework, using as reference points the shifts in personnel accompanying the major changes in the Comintern's general line. Notably, however, by the late 1930s, changes in Comintern policy no longer required accompanying changes in personnel. Importantly, too, the Comintern's ability to impose these changes on its national sections varied widely – from the KPD, which marched in step with the centre, to smaller, illegal and more peripheral parties which did not. These qualifications apart, when discussing the Comintern the following periodization is valuable: first, there was an early, relatively open period in which the Bolsheviks did not yet aim solely to achieve the top-down domination of world communism (1919–21); second, the united front policy saw greater Soviet influence (1921–23); third, the period of Bolshevikization; and, finally, the waves of 'Stalinization' during the 'class against class' policy and subsequent popular front. In a process of ever-tightening centralization, authority in the Comintern and control over the cadres implementing policy was usurped by the 'Russian delegation' to the ECCI in a process which made Stalin the ultimate arbiter in policy-making; this process began as early as 1926. A numerical Russification of Comintern cadres was not necessary (although Russians dominated the Moscow-based technical cadre); there was a cultural Russification among political exiles and western communists who identified closely with Bolshevik practice. Importantly, organizational practices from the years of Bolshevikization cemented the interpenetration of not only the Russian party in the Comintern, but also the Soviet secret police, which initially worked through the 'special department' (1930) with all of its implications for 'foreign' communists during the Great Terror.

The following summarizes such a process of change. Initially, a Comintern cadre came from revolutionary Russia, might be of Jewish extraction and had attended university; he (there were few women) was slightly older than the up-and-coming cadres from the West, and left the apparatus after only a short period of activity in the leadership in order to work within the Russian state. During the united front policy (1921–23), Comintern cadres of Russian origin began to lose ground to cadres from the western workers' movement. The typical Comintern cadre was younger, but continued often to come from a Jewish family and had attended university. The ensuing Bolshevikization of the Comintern apparatus and its national sections saw the rise of 'workers from the bench'; however, they did not yet outnumber intellectuals. The age profile of cadres remained similar to previous years,

too. It was the first wave of Stalinization (1929–33) that brought about a new cadres profile that can be identified with reference to age, social origins and education. An impetuous, younger cadre of proletarian origins entered the highest Comintern authorities. It did not, however, challenge the predominance of cadres who were closely connected with the Russian party and had a significant degree of continuity in the apparatus (Manuilsky, Piatnitsky, Kuusinen and Vasiliev). Admittedly, ‘young Turks’ of French, British and German origin ousted long-serving Comintern cadres such as Humbert-Droz; after fulfilling their role in eliminating the ‘conciliators’, they too became scapegoats for the Comintern’s declining influence. The popular front policy (1934–35) was understood by the Comintern as a turning point in this process. Notably, however, it did not bring any rejuvenation of Comintern cadres; rather, a process of ageing was only offset by young cadres from the ‘third world’. The erstwhile strong representation of Russian and German cadres now declined in favour of a new guard from countries courted by the Soviet Union – France, Czechoslovakia, Britain and North America. Comintern cadres with only a basic schooling or vocational training were constantly on the advance and, in 1934, for the first time outstripped those who had attended university. The exception to this rule were cadres recruited from what the Comintern called the ‘colonial and semi-colonial world’. Importantly, the ‘proletarianization’ of the leadership structures – which accelerated during the process of the Stalinization – was not driven by cadres with basic school education. Genuine model proletarian cadres, like Thorez, Thälmann and Pollitt, were tied into a collective in which intellectuals fulfilling international roles could continue to enjoy privileged, if less public, relations with the Comintern apparatus. Fried in France provides one example; Dutt in Britain, more controversially, another.

Notes

- 1 This chapter derives in part from the research project ‘The Comintern: People, Apparatus and Structures’ at the University of Hanover. For the findings of this project, see M. Buckmiller and K. Meschkat (eds), *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Komintern* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2007).
- 2 H. Weber, *Die Kommunistische Internationale. Eine Dokumentation* (Hanover: Dietz, 1966), pp. 9–16; J. Drabkin, ‘The Idea of the World Revolution and its Transformations’, in M. Narinsky and J. Rojahn (eds.), *Centre and Periphery: The History of the Comintern in the Light of New Documents* (Amsterdam: IISH, 1996), pp. 46–54.
- 3 *Protokoll des Vierten Weltkongresses der Komintern. Petrograd-Moskau vom 5. Nov. bis 5. Dez. 1922* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, 1923), pp. 803–13.

- 4 Ibid. See also the report by Piatnitsky in *Protokoll Fünfter Kongress der Komintern* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, 1924), pp. 982–7.
- 5 For the statutes, see *Thesen und Resolutionen des V. Weltkongresses der Komintern. Moskau, vom 17. Juni bis 8. Juli 1924* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, 1924), pp. 83–8.
- 6 A. Vatlin and M. Wehner, 'Genosse Thomas und die Geheimtätigkeit der Komintern in Deutschland 1919–25', *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 1 (1994), 1–19.
- 7 *Tätigkeitsbericht der Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1926* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, 1926), pp. 9–11.
- 8 H. Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus. Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/M: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969), pp. 53–185.
- 9 M. Hájek, 'Die Beziehungen zwischen der Komintern und der bolschewistischen Partei in den Jahren, 1919–29', *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (Berlin, 1995), 63–99.
- 10 In December 1925, following the establishment of the Soviet Union, the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) was renamed the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik).
- 11 A. Vatlin, 'Die Russische Delegation in der Komintern: Machtzentrum des internationalen Kommunismus zwischen Sinowjew und Stalin', *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (Berlin, 1993), 82–99.
- 12 Ibid; F. Firsov, 'Mechanism of Power Realization in the Comintern', in *Centenaire Jules Humbert-Droz. Colloque sur l'Internationale communiste, La Chaux-de-Fonds 25–28 septembre 1991* (Fondation Jules Humbert-Droz, 1992), pp. 449–66.
- 13 Vatlin, 'Die Russische Delegation', p. 99.
- 14 Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), 'Personal plan', 8 May 1932, f. 495/7/21; P. Huber, 'The Moscow Headquarters of the Comintern', in N. E. Rosenfeldt, B. Jensen and E. Kulavig (eds.), *Mechanisms of Power in the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 124–45.
- 15 RGASPI, Letter of 20 August 1931, f. 495/274/63.
- 16 R. Müller, 'Unentwegte Disziplin und permanenter Verdacht', in W. Neugebauer (ed.), *Von der Utopie zum Terror. Stalinismus–Analysen* (Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1994); B. Unfried, 'Die Konstituierung des stalinistischen Kaders in Kritik und Selbstkritik', *Traverse*, 3 (1995), 71–88.
- 17 F. I. Firsov, 'Die Säuberungen im Apparat der Komintern', in H. Weber and D. Staritz (eds.), *Kommunisten verfolgen Kommunisten. Stalinistischer Terror und Säuberungen in den kommunistischen Parteien Europas seit den 30er Jahren* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1993), pp. 39–42.
- 18 RGASPI, Letter of 3 January 1936, f. 495/18/1047, cited in A. Vatlin, 'Kaderpolitik und Säuberungen in der Komintern', in H. Weber and U. Mähler (eds.), *Terror. Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936–53* (Paderborn: Schoeningh Ferdinand, 1998), p. 99.
- 19 RGASPI, 'Liste von nicht vertrauenswürdigen Mitarbeitern', f. 495/10a/39; L. Babitschenko, 'Die Moskvín-Kommission. Neue Einzelheiten zur politisch-organisatorischen Struktur der Komintern in der Repressionsphase', in *The International Newsletter of Historical Studies on Comintern, Communism and Stalinism*, 2 (1994/95), 38–9.
- 20 It was possible to determine the social origins of 475 of the 580 cadres.

- 21 Weber, *Die Wandlung*, p. 28.
- 22 RGASPI, 'Spravka', 20 June 1940, f. 495/17/157.
- 23 We were able to establish the educational background of 519 of the 580 leading cadres.
- 24 H. Klehr, *Communist Cadre: The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute, 1978), p. 107; H. Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 28–9.
- 25 Only 33 per cent of the 230 university students can, with certainty, be shown to have graduated.
- 26 RGASPI, 'Personalakte', f. 495/65a/5678.
- 27 C. Pannetier, 'Thorez–Marty: Paris–Moscou, Moscou–Paris', in Narinsky and Rojahn (eds), *Centre and Periphery*, pp. 203–17.
- 28 B. Lazitch and M. Drachkovitch, 'The Communist International', in M. Drachkovitch (ed.), *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864–1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 181.
- 29 E. H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution: From Lenin to Stalin, 1917–29* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1980), p. 180.
- 30 A. Agosti, 'Il mondo della III Internazionale: gli stati maggiori', in *Storia del marxismo. Volume terzo. Il marxismo nell'età della Terza Internazionale. Dalla rivoluzione d'Ottobre alla crisi del '29* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1979).
- 31 We have included Litvinov, although he never went to university.
- 32 B. Studer and B. Unfried, *Der stalinistische Parteikader. Identitätsstiftende Praktiken und Diskurse in der Sowjetunion der dreißiger Jahre* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001).
- 33 Exceptions are the leading cadre from Italy: three of the five had attended university.
- 34 A. Kriegel and S. Courtois, *Eugen Fried: Le Grand Secret du PCF* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).
- 35 J. Gotovitch, M. Narinski et al. (eds.), *Komintern: L'Histoire et les Hommes: Dictionnaire biographique de l'Internationale communiste* (Paris: De l'Atelier, 2001), pp. 150–3.
- 36 J. Humbert-Droz, *Mémoires de Jules Humbert-Droz. De Lénine à Staline. Dix ans au service de l'Internationale communiste, 1921–31* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1971), p. 355.
- 37 Agosti, 'Il mondo della terza Internazionale', pp. 388–406.
- 38 We could attribute no nationality to three cadres.
- 39 P. Huber, 'Der Moskauer Apparat der Komintern: Geschäftsleitung, Personalentscheide und Mitarbeiterbestand', *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (Berlin, 1995), 148–9.
- 40 O. Khlevniouk, *Le cercle du Kremlin. Staline et le Bureau politique dans les années 30: les jeux du pouvoir* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).
- 41 For Latin America, see L. Jeifets, V. Jeifets and P. Huber (eds), *La Internacional comunista y América Latina, 1919–43. Diccionario biográfico* (Moscow/Geneva: Selbstverlag, 2004), pp. 11–21.
- 42 RGASPI, f. 495/18/1179.
- 43 J.-F. Fayet, *Karl Radek (1885–1939): Biographie politique* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).
- 44 Unszlicht (military and conspiratorial work), Schüller (representative of the Young Communist International), Raskolnikov (military work, Eastern secretariat), Zetkin (women).

- 45 J. Mothes, 'Luis gegen Mariátegui? Zur Rolle von Jules Humbert-Droz bei der Entwicklung der Lateinamerikapolitik der Kommunistischen Internationale', in *Centenaire*, pp. 139–67.
- 46 On the role of the smaller commission, see P. Huber, 'Les organes dirigeants du Komintern: un chantier permanent', in S. Wolikow (ed.), *Une histoire en révolution? Du bon usage des archives, de Moscou et d'ailleurs* (Dijon: EUD, 1996), pp. 211–26.
- 47 L. Lih, O. V. Naumov, O. V. Khlevniuk (eds), *Stalin's Letters to Molotov, 1925–36* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).
- 48 A. Vatlin, 'Die Russische Delegation', 82–93.
- 49 Cited in O. V. Chlevnjuk et al., *Stalinskoe Politburo v 30-e gody. Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1995), p. 178.
- 50 We disregard Lozovsky, the general secretary of the Red International of Labour Unions, as he solely represented this organization in the leading bodies of the Comintern.
- 51 In December 1939, Kuusinen was removed from the ECCI secretariat as he was appointed chairman of the presidium of supreme soviets of the Karelo-Finnish Republic; he was replaced by J. Koplenig.
- 52 Officially, Thälmann was a member of the political secretariat until 1935, but had been imprisoned in Germany since 1933.
- 53 Florin was removed in December 1933 but replaced Heckert in 1934.
- 54 Resolution 10 August 1935, cited in G. M. Adibekov, E. N. Sachnazarova and K. K. Sirinja, *Organizatsionnaia struktura kominterna. 1919–43*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997), p. 241.
- 55 Gotovitch et al., *Komintern*, pp. 399–403.
- 56 K. Morgan, *Harry Pollitt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); M. Thorez, *Fils du peuple* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1937).
- 57 RGASPI, Letter to the ECCI Secretariat, 5 November 1937, f. 495/18/1227.
- 58 A. Agosti, *Togliatti. Un uomo di frontiera* (Turin: Utet, 2003).

5

The Impact of 'Bolshevization' and 'Stalinization' on French and German Communism: A Comparative View

Andreas Wirsching

Relations between the Bolsheviks, the Communist International (Comintern) and the national communist parties from 1919 onwards have always been the subject of controversy. In Germany, for example, there has long been a dispute over the existence of a kind of early 'Luxemburgism' or 'democratic communism', the collapse of which was followed after 1924 by the forced 'Stalinization' postulated by Hermann Weber.¹ Alternatively, should one speak of an early 'Bolshevization', which had started in 1920–21 to take away the freedom of manoeuvre possessed initially by independent forces within each national party? This was how many contemporaries perceived the situation, and Richard Löwenthal gave solid evidential backing to this view in 1960.²

Another equally important question is whether the Russian party, the Comintern and the national party apparatuses also played a dominant role in the day-to-day activities of the communist parties at the grass-roots level. Did the great ideological and personal disagreements of the time concern only the 'vanguard', the higher-level party functionaries? Did they lack any real relevance to the party's local basis, the 'milieu', having, so to speak, seeped away by the time that they reached that level?³ On the other hand, a more recent study of the KPD in the final phase of the Weimar Republic sees the German communists as 'Stalin's loyal retainers'.⁴

Historical comparison can help to clear away the uncertainty left by such controversies. This is particularly true if we compare the two biggest communist parties outside Russia: The German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) numbered some 400,000 members at the end of 1920 and more than 250,000 in 1932, while its French counterpart, the French Communist Party (*Parti communiste français*; PCF), mustered more than 300,000 members in 1937,

during the heyday of the popular front.⁵ Comparing these cases enables us to show what they had in common and what divided them.⁶ Comparison brings their historical individuality into sharper focus and subjects the concepts of 'Bolshevization' and 'Stalinization' to a dual empirical examination. From the methodological point of view, the task is made much easier by the existence of three possible yardsticks of comparison: the ideology of Marxism–Leninism, the Comintern, with its increasing domination by the Russians, and the Comintern's compulsory ideological and tactical prescriptions. Taking this as our starting point, we shall pursue three lines of investigation in what follows. It will be shown, first, that Bolshevization started early in both the KPD and the PCF and with a striking degree of *parallelism*. Even under Lenin, the parties were increasingly subject to discipline from Moscow. The second point concerns the completely different *extent* of Bolshevization in France and Germany, while a third line of reasoning will involve going into the widely divergent *impact* of Bolshevization and Stalinization in the two countries.

Parallels of Bolshevization

At the time of their foundation, the French (1920) and German (1919) communist parties were extremely heterogeneous. Above all, 'left communist' and syndicalist tendencies initially played a central part in both of them. These groups found any idea of subordination to a cadre-based party repugnant in principle. It was, therefore, a necessary prerequisite of Bolshevization, in the sense of the subjection of the KPD and the PCF to Moscow's power of command, that left communism and syndicalism be eliminated from the two parties, or at least that their ideological principles no longer put in question the leadership claim of the militant Leninist party of a 'new type'. This happened early on in both parties, if under differing conditions. Of course, the Soviets and the Comintern would hardly have been able to force through their claim to supreme power over their national sections without the assistance of competing factions in the parties themselves.

In the KPD, for instance, Paul Levi outplayed his party opponents as early as October 1919 at the party's Heidelberg congress. Relying on the support of a letter from the imprisoned Karl Radek, Levi compelled the left-communist wing to leave the party.⁷ This did not happen through discussion or 'intra-party democracy'; instead, Levi orchestrated the process from his position in the leadership using the argument of the superior understanding possessed by 'the vanguard of the

working class'.⁸ Leninist principles of organization and struggle were therefore already to be found at the Heidelberg congress, even though the Comintern, which had just been founded, did not intervene directly. Organization 'from the summit to the base' was now implemented throughout the KPD. Stirrings of 'intra-party democracy' after unification with the left of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; USPD) between October and December 1920 were also nipped in the bud, and the dominant position of the party's functionaries increased continuously. As a well-informed police report summarized the process in 1922, the communist leaders had in two years 'accomplished the feat of mastering the membership' and creating a strictly centralized party organization.⁹

In France, by contrast, the PCF, which was founded at the end of 1920, remained at first to a far greater extent under syndicalist influence. There, the burden of political opposition to the First World War was borne to a considerable degree by syndicalist forces.¹⁰ Subsequent disappointment over the failure of the attempts at a revolutionary general strike in 1919 and 1920 gave rise to a 'new' kind of syndicalism, based predominantly in the railway union. This 'new' syndicalism declared its support for disciplining the forces of the revolution, hence also for joining up with Moscow and cooperating closely with the communist party. The PCF initially drew tremendous vitality from the syndicalist hope that Bolshevik theory and French practice could be combined together.¹¹

Of course, this optimism rested on the continued ideological misconception that the October Revolution had been a genuinely syndicalist uprising. French syndicalists like Alfred Rosmer therefore hoped to achieve a 'welding' (*soudure*) of communism and revolutionary syndicalism.¹² But, in fact, Bolshevism offered no room in the long run to those syndicalists, who viewed trade union autonomy as an inviolable value, despite all their sympathy for communism. This was demonstrated by the great crisis of 1924 in the PCF, which culminated with the expulsion of the syndicalists Rosmer, Pierre Monatte and Maurice Chambelland.¹³

By this time the left-communist forces, whose guiding light was a federalist model based on council (soviet) democracy, had already been eliminated from the PCF. In the year-and-a-half after the Tours congress, an 'ultra-left' tendency led by Maurice Heine had held a dominant position, particularly in the Paris district. These Parisian ultra-leftists trusted in the spontaneity of the masses and warned

against 'oligarchic centralism'.¹⁴ They believed, like the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*; KAPD), that they could combine federalist and anti-centralist principles with allegiance to the Comintern.¹⁵ Since 1921, the *Fédération de la Seine* had had a statute on the lines of the Soviet constitution, modelled on a democracy of councils. Just as in Germany, however, the left communists were slowly but surely forced out. By the middle of 1922, they had lost their majority in the Paris district and, in July, the statutes of the *Fédération de la Seine* were changed on the instructions of the Comintern. The Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) had already rejected them out of hand on 11 June 1922: the federalist principle was explicitly declared to be 'incompatible' with the true interests of a revolutionary organization. To refer to the federative structure of the new Soviet state in this context was 'radically wrong', since this confused state and party structures. 'The International condemns in the most categorical fashion the application of the principles of federalism and autonomism in a revolutionary party which must be a powerful lever of communist action.'¹⁶ In the Paris district, an executive committee of 15 now replaced the committee of roughly 100 which had served essentially as a discussion forum for the largely independent individual party branches.¹⁷

Both syndicalist and left-communist federalist tendencies were opposed in principle to the Leninist model of the vanguard party.¹⁸ This meant that they had already set up a politico-ideological position contrary to Bolshevism. It was therefore in the logic of the situation that there was no place for them in the communist movement. But how did things stand with those early communists who had no fundamental ideological differences with Bolshevism but, at the same time, were unwilling to accept Moscow's authority unconditionally? Their political fate permits us to demonstrate in exemplary fashion the degree of dependence the communist parties had already committed themselves to by accepting the Comintern's '21 conditions' of entry in 1920. At the Tours congress, in December 1920, the French Socialists (*Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière*; SFIO) split and the PCF was founded. But it was also the scene of the sensational case of Jean Longuet, Karl Marx's grandson. Longuet and his group of 'reconstructionists' rejected the Bolsheviks' centralist principles of organization despite their substantial agreement with them over ideological matters, advocating that the '21 conditions' be accepted only with reservations. A telegram to the French congress composed by Zinoviev, signed by the members of the ECCI and read out to the ECCI plenum, marked

the definitive break: Longuet and his group were disqualified as hardened 'agents of the bourgeoisie'. The Comintern wanted nothing more to do with them.¹⁹ Zinoviev's intervention destroyed the hope that a broad majority could be secured for the acceptance of the '21 conditions' with the inclusion of the supporters of the 'middle line' associated with Longuet, Faure and others.

The subsequent period would show very quickly that this was Moscow's fundamental method of operation from the beginning. It must be stressed here that ideological questions by no means played the central role. What was at stake was rather the unconditional recognition of the moral authority and the power of command of the Comintern and its apparatus, which was controlled by the Bolsheviks. This can be illustrated especially clearly in relation to the French and German approaches to the question of the 'united front', hotly disputed at the start of the 1920s. The united front tactic was essentially the invention of the KPD and its leader Paul Levi, who issued an 'open letter' on 8 January 1921 in which he endeavoured to apply it to workers' organizations in the sense of a fighting unity of action.²⁰ The March Action initially pushed this line into the background, but it was taken up again in the course of the year. After the short-lived phase of the so-called 'theory of the offensive', which ended in defeat, the third Comintern congress (June–August 1921) accomplished an about-turn, voting for the slogan 'To the Masses' which, towards the end of the year, underwent further development, becoming the tactic of the 'united front'.²¹ This approach met with considerable support in a KPD disillusioned by the disastrous outcome of the March Action.²² The French communists, in contrast, were among the most vehement opponents of the new line. One year after its split from the SFIO, the question of the united front tactic plunged the PCF into a severe crisis and a period of disorientation. Most French communists found it absolutely unthinkable to issue a slogan of 'unity' all at once following their past polemics against the 'treacherous' and 'opportunist' socialists. Accordingly, the PCF initially mounted intense resistance to the united front tactic. This unavoidably raised the fundamental question of Moscow's claim to supremacy.²³ By 1923, however, such resistance had been broken by the massive intervention of the Comintern. Trotsky, Zinoviev and the ECCI exploited the tensions within the PCF between its 'left wing' around Boris Souvarine and Albert Treint and the 'centrists' around Louis-Oscar Frossard and Marcel Cachin, issuing an ultimatum by which they demanded that the PCF recognize the Comintern's supreme decision-making power.²⁴ The Comintern's

emissaries, Jules Humbert-Droz and Dmitri Manuilsky, immediately backed up this demand, with the former being endowed with far-reaching plenipotentiary powers in accord with the 16th of the Comintern's 21 conditions.²⁵

Under these circumstances, the PCF did not have the option of a policy of compromise between different tendencies. After the irregular and chaotic course of the French party's second congress, held in October 1922 in Paris,²⁶ the Comintern's fourth world congress in December favoured the 'left wing' of the PCF against the 'centre' around Frossard, the party leader. There followed the first great split, Frossard's resignation, his withdrawal from the communist movement and the definitive subjection of the PCF to Comintern discipline.²⁷ This is how Frossard himself later described the way his life in the communist party ended:

We had dreamed of combining together in a harmonious synthesis the immense humanity of Jaurès and the boldness of Lenin's revolutionary accomplishment. They endeavoured to subject us to a *régime* which was reminiscent of the Jesuit Order in its narrow dogmatism and the corpse-like submission it demanded.²⁸

In Germany, the legacy of an early 'Luxemburgist' or, indeed, 'democratic' communism was liquidated along with Paul Levi. As early as 1920, there was already serious friction between the KPD, led by Levi, and Moscow about the admission of the KAPD to the Comintern.²⁹ And whilst the Comintern was making the tactic of the united front its official doctrine, it banished its 'inventors' as 'right opportunists'.³⁰ Subsequent criticism of the united front tactic in Germany came mainly from the 'left' leadership of the Berlin party district, around Ruth Fischer and Arkady Maslow. In France, on the other hand, the 'lefts' were represented above all by Albert Treint, who was, paradoxically, the sole advocate of the new line.³¹ It was squaring the circle to propagate simultaneously a split and unity in a non-revolutionary situation, and the attempt inevitably produced more and more antagonisms and ideological inconsistencies. Precisely for that reason, however, the united front concept offered a broad array of tactical levers for getting rid of obnoxious opponents within both the Comintern and the national parties. Anyone who wanted to interpret the united front as a genuine rapprochement, like the Berlin KPD functionary Ernst Reuter (Friesland), soon ceased to have a place in the party.³²

Paul Levi and Ernst Reuter in the KPD, Louis-Oscar Frossard in the PCF and soon also Boris Souvarine, who was defeated by the 'left' faction around Treint and Suzanne Girault and expelled from the party as a 'Trotskyist':³³ these four names are only the most prominent examples among a large number of expulsions or resignations from the two parties. They all failed in their attempt to combine political and intellectual autonomy with a life inside the communist party, even when they were prepared to make considerable sacrifices to achieve this. This early dependence on Moscow of the communist parties of the West has as yet nothing to do with Stalin, but it had a great deal to do with Leninist principles of organization. At the outset, this did not appear as fully formed organizational dependence; it was more a matter of ideological and moral subordination, because the content of the communists' ideology, which was oriented towards the proletarian revolution, with its Bolshevik 'success model', necessarily implied the recognition of the latter as the supreme decision-making authority. The Bolsheviks, they thought, had acted in consonance with the predetermined course of politico-social development when they gave the wheel of world history a decisive turn forwards. It was therefore no longer possible to have a fundamental disagreement with them if one was to avoid being accused of 'opportunism' or 'counter-revolution'. In the long run, therefore, every communist functionary was given an inescapable choice: either a corrupt and unconditional subservience to the will of Moscow or a break with the movement.

This parallelism in the history of the two parties' subjection to Moscow induces us to speak of an early Bolshevization of both the KPD and the PCF, a form of Bolshevization which needs to be distinguished clearly from the way contemporaries understood the concept after 1924, when the issue was rather a shift in the basis of the party organization, from local associations to factory cells. Bolshevization in the overarching sense means, rather, the implementation of rule by the apparatus, ultimately legitimated within the party purely by the authority of the world-historical vanguard residing in Moscow. Bolshevization in this sense was already completed while Lenin was still alive, and it affected the KPD and the PCF equally. It was also the necessary prerequisite for the process of 'Stalinization' which set in after 1924 and which, like Bolshevization, gripped the German and French parties in a strikingly parallel fashion. In essence, Stalinization merely constituted a new stage of Bolshevization. Despite great differences in the surrounding circumstances, it was accomplished in both parties at a more or less equal pace. The whole process was indissolubly

linked with the factional struggle within the Russian party. The German and French 'lefts' – in the former case Ruth Fischer and Arkady Maslow, in the latter Suzanne Girault and Albert Treint – pushed their party opponents out of power by branding them as 'Trotskyists'. These conflicts formed, as it were, the reflected image of the Russian power struggle between the 'troika' (Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev) and the Trotskyist opposition. Zinoviev's adherents in Germany and France could only stay in power while the outcome of the power struggle with Trotsky was still undecided. Later, Zinoviev himself became Stalin's opponent. This in turn was followed at the end of 1925 by the simultaneous removal from office of the 'left' party leaderships of Fischer–Maslow and Girault–Treint. They were finally expelled from the communist movement in 1926 and 1928 respectively.³⁴ The Stalinization of the KPD and the PCF therefore ran parallel to Stalin's victory over his opponents within Russia: at the end of this process, both parties were headed by persons who embodied the principle of Stalinism 'plain and simple', and who, perhaps not accidentally, shared a strong physical resemblance: Ernst Thälmann and Maurice Thorez.

The different extent of Bolshevization

It is, of course, not enough simply to note the parallelism in the process of Bolshevization. We must also analyse the dialectic between the initial politico-ideological conditions and their divergent application in each national context. Only on this basis can we gain a view of the differences in the extent of Bolshevization carried through by Moscow. The two parties do in fact display considerable variation from this angle. Even after 1924, when leading syndicalists were expelled from the party, a syndicalist undercurrent continued to exist in the PCF, unlike the KPD. The most visible symptom of this imbrication between French communism and syndicalism, which continued in the teeth of Bolshevik ideology, was the existence of communist trade unions. The United General Confederation of Labour (*Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire*; CGTU) split from the General Confederation of Labour (*Confédération générale du travail*) in 1921, against the wishes of the Comintern.³⁵ And its individual member unions insisted on the inviolability of trade union autonomy. The historical background to this was the fact that in France it was the skilled workers above all who formed the mainstay of the communist movement. They were subject to a smaller risk of unemployment and tended to occupational self-segregation. Their politico-social consciousness was oriented ver-

tically, towards the craft rather than horizontally towards the class. This is an important reason why the policy of the PCF at the grass-roots level remained far more trade union-oriented than that of the KPD. This was both a strength and a weakness: the trade unions of the CGTU more than once provided the troops for communist actions but, at the same time, the French communists were inhibited by their regard for their clientele and were therefore frequently compelled to take into account the needs of different interest groups in a quasi-opportunist fashion.³⁶

This was the reason why, when the PCF was forced into line ideologically as a result of the Comintern's sixth world congress, which among other things gave its backing to the slogans of 'radicalization' and the 'war danger', considerable friction arose in its relationship with the CGTU. Whereas the Comintern and the French party leadership intensified work in the trade unions and hoped that this would be a way of combating the steep decline in party membership, the vast majority of the ordinary members were interested above all in their corporative concerns. This led to notorious tensions.³⁷ The communist leaders bemoaned the 'opportunism' found in the ranks; conversely, criticism came from below of the 'mécánization' (mechanical application) of communist slogans and their 'phraseology'.³⁸ There could be no question of a genuine radicalization of the workers as postulated by the sixth world congress, it was said, and the instructions issued by the party leadership could not be put into effect.³⁹ Admittedly, most of those who were dissatisfied with the new line remained silent. The dissentients' hallmark was to feign acceptance of the new course in order subsequently to sabotage it.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, fierce discontent was repeatedly expressed at the party's grass roots. There were repeated complaints about the 'bureaucratization of the party';⁴¹ the Bolsheviks' methods were occasionally openly equated with Mussolini's.⁴² It was only a small step from this to demanding the removal of the party leadership.⁴³ In the meantime, anyone who openly resisted the new line was expelled from the party.⁴⁴ In the PCF, therefore, the spectrum of Stalinization began with open disagreement and ended in 'purge'.

At the beginning, the KPD did actually have a social profile analogous to that of the PCF. And among German communists too, voices were raised in the mid-1920s regretting 'tendencies towards an aristocracy of labour' among, for example, the Berlin metalworkers.⁴⁵ But at the end of the decade, the social crisis of the Weimar Republic converted the KPD into the party of the unemployed and the *déclassés*. As early as 1927, when the KPD carried out a '*Reichsgeneralkontrolle*' – in

other words, an overall investigation of the party's condition – around half of its members had no settled professional occupation. In Berlin, for example, only 7,255 (51 per cent) of the 14,015 party members enumerated were employed in a factory or workshop.⁴⁶ A person's professional qualification became irrelevant once he or she was outside the factory or workshop environment. The professional and mental dividing lines within the working class, which in France remained for the most part insurmountable, faded away in Germany under the impact of the collective experience of expensive and scarce provisions, unemployment and housing problems. The communist segment of society increasingly formed a radical 'counter-world' to the Weimar state from the political, economic and cultural point of view.

In Germany, therefore, to a much greater degree than in France, the paradigms of the 'third period' seemed to be plausible in terms of past experience. Bukharin and the then chief economist of the Comintern, Eugen Varga, derived large parts of the empirical material for their 'analysis of capitalism' and theoretical underpinning of the third period from looking at the Weimar Republic.⁴⁷ Varga therefore had Germany in mind, alongside the US and Britain, when he spoke at the sixth world congress of the 'structural unemployment' which had arisen since the start of the 1920s.⁴⁸ But it was, above all, during the economic crisis of 1930–33 that the real existence of the German proletariat seemed to confirm that the Comintern was right to assert a connection between rationalization and unemployment. In France, on the other hand, the theses of the third period, with their arguments drawn from impoverishment theory, were confronted with a communist party which even after 1928 had a social profile still highly dominated by skilled, specialized workers. For them, the experience of unemployment played almost no part. Varga himself noted that in France the stabilization crisis had not brought about chronic mass unemployment, and that the wages of the workers there were distinctly higher than in Germany.⁴⁹

In addition, in France the socialists and the reformist trade unions had long ceased to play the same role in domestic politics as their counterparts in Germany, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) and the General German Confederation of Trade Unions (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*.) Nor did they have at their disposal organizations of comparable strength. In Germany, and above all in Prussia, SPD ministers and police chiefs held office, and social democratic trade union leaders negotiated with the employers. German conditions therefore offered

incomparably clearer ideological and propagandist points of contact for the thesis of 'social fascism' than in France, pernicious and alien to reality as it was. State power, which was in any case perceived *a priori* as hostile, frequently confronted the German communists through the agency of the social democrats. There appeared to be a persistent and unbroken continuity in social democratic repression of the KPD, from Gustav Noske in 1919, through the Prussian minister of the interior Carl Severing, and right up to the Berlin police chief Albert Grzesinski. The Berlin '*Blutmai*' of 1929 only strengthened this impression.

Even in the KPD there were considerable tensions after 1928 between the party centre and the local branches, and by no means every 'ultra-left' party instruction was put into effect 'on the spot'. Nevertheless, the contrast with France is very clear: the KPD did *not* plunge into a fundamental crisis after the ultra-left turn of 1928. In the KPD, in similar fashion to the PCF, critics were expelled or silenced. But, unlike their French comrades, the German communists combined the turn to the left with an increase in numerical strength, that is to say with a rise in the number of both voters and members.

The divergent impact of Bolshevization and Stalinization

This background helps to explain why Bolshevization and Stalinization (which was essentially complete by 1929) had a very different impact, indeed a practically contrary one, on the two communist parties: under the impulse of the economic crisis, mass unemployment and increasing impoverishment, the KPD achieved its greatest successes during this period, at least as far as membership figures and election results are concerned. Between the end of 1929 and the end of 1932, the number of paid-up members of the KPD rose from 98,527 to 252,000.⁵⁰ In France, on the other hand, the ultra-left turn of 1928–29 had precisely the opposite result: the ruthless, centrally directed implementation of the new line produced a massive outflow of members. While the PCF still had 52,372 members at its disposal in 1928, the number had sunk to 28,825 by 1933.⁵¹

The PCF, unlike the KPD, was unable to profit, even during the economic crisis, which began hitting France in 1932, from the dynamism of protest in conditions of social upheaval. Until at least 1933, it was essentially barred from having agitational access to the groups which were hardest hit by the changes in industrial structure during the economic crisis, namely youth in general, unskilled workers, the

unemployed, women and immigrants. Communist workers who were in employment (skilled workers) were increasingly repelled by the Comintern's ultra-left tactic imposed from above, even where they had not already fallen victim to one of the party purges. The impulse towards ideological hardness produced by the turn to the third period therefore failed to achieve its objectives in France. The PCF fell into complete isolation, with the result that the party was increasingly regarded as a kind of sect. A report on party organization compiled in 1933, after the removal of the Barbé-Celoir leadership and under the impression of Hitler's seizure of power, delivered a withering verdict on the development of the PCF between 1928 and 1932. The slogan of the third period that the situation was directly revolutionary, the report said, had led to a catastrophic policy of sectarianism, which could only be carried through by a massive intimidation of the party at the basis. 'Giving orders became a generalized practice; many youthful party cadres, who knew nothing of trade union work, and sometimes were not even enrolled in a trade union, brutalized the older cadres even in trade union meetings, accusing them at random of opportunism.'⁵²

It was, so to speak, the PCF's 'opportunistic' approach to the socialists and the acceptance of the republican and democratic state (at least in formal terms) within the framework of the popular front, that finally led it out of the political ghetto of the third period. After 1934, the French party's membership figures literally exploded. This was the combined result of the pathos of 'anti-fascism', the overall impulse towards political mobilization that followed the change of government in 1932, and the social consequences of the economic crisis. Between 1933 and the end of 1936, party membership rose to 288,483 – a tenfold increase.⁵³ Sharply formulated, the contrast between the two parties was this: the KPD took on the identity that was congenial to it during the ultra-left period of the years 1929 to 1933, while the PCF found its identity in the popular front. The latter's political language was oriented less towards the themes of (the working) class and the class struggle than the category of '*le peuple*', which implied a tendency to look to an above-class consensus. While the KPD achieved its furthest successes under the banner of the greatest possible inculcation of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the PCF's successes took place under the sign of relative de-ideologization. The PCF became integrated into the left-wing consensus of the popular front and, in many parts of France in 1936, it became the strongest political force, thereby laying the foundation for its position as the most important western communist party of the early post-war period.

Conclusion

Parallelism in Bolshevization and Stalinization, but at the same time fundamental differences with regard to the extent and impact of these processes: this is how the comparison can be summarized. Bolshevization was accomplished in both parties under entirely different conditions, yet almost in obedience to identical laws. This is a decisive index of the fact that the subordination of European communism to the Moscow centre should by no means be ascribed to exogenous factors. This parallelism arose rather from a structurally immanent inevitability, which in turn revealed the ideological dogmatism and totalitarian intransigence of communism and was already set in motion by Lenin and the Russian October Revolution.

Notes

- 1 H. Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus. Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969).
- 2 R. Löwenthal, 'The Bolshevization of the Spartacus League', in D. Footman (ed.), *International Communism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), pp. 23–71.
- 3 K.-M. Mallmann, *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik. Sozialgeschichte einer revolutionären Bewegung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996). See, in more detail, A. Wirsching, "'Stalinisierung' oder entideologisierte "Nischengesellschaft"? Alte Einsichten und neue Thesen zum Charakter der KPD in der Weimarer Republik', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 45 (1997), 449–66. Also J. Becker and H. Jentsch, 'Divergenzen zur Rolle der KPD in der Weimarer Republik', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 42 (2000), 6–47.
- 4 B. Hoppe, *In Stalins Gefolgschaft. Die KPD und Moskau 1928–33* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2007). Hoppe also makes the conceptual distinction between Stalinization and Bolshevization (p. 70).
- 5 H. A. Winkler *Von der Revolution zur Stabilisierung. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1918 bis 1924* (Berlin and Bonn: Dietz Nachf., 1985, second edition), pp. 504–5; Mallmann, *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik*, p. 87; S. Courtois and M. Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, second edition), p. 461.
- 6 There is a detailed comparison between German and French communism in A. Wirsching, *Vom Weltkrieg zum Bürgerkrieg? Politischer Extremismus in Deutschland und Frankreich 1918–33/39. Berlin and Paris in Vergleich* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1999).
- 7 H. M. Bock, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918 bis 1923. Ein Beitrag zur Sozial- und Ideengeschichte der frühen Weimarer Republik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993, second edition), pp. 144ff. On

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 - 13 M. Dreyfus, *PCF. Crises et dissidences: de 1920 à nos jours* (Brussels: Éditions Complexes, 1990), pp. 21ff.
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- 45 Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin (SAPMO), Protokoll des Bezirksparteitags der Berliner KPD, 16–17 March 1929, Bl. 106 (Referat Hein), 113 (Referat Dahlem), 352 (Referat Kasper), RY 1 I 3/1–2/8.
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6

Paul Levi and the Turning Point of 1921: Bolshevik Emissaries and International Discipline in the Time of Lenin

Jean-François Fayet

Levi himself has no idea of the significance of the differences existing between him and the executive.¹

Karl Radek

The executive conducts itself simply as a Cheka acting beyond Russia's borders.²

Paul Levi

On its formation in 1919, the president of the Communist International (Comintern), Grigori Zinoviev, described it as being no more than a 'propaganda association'.³ For its secretary, Karl Radek, it was 'merely a symbol', while the chairman of the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD), Paul Levi, called the Comintern an 'expression of the solidarity of the international proletariat with the Russian Revolution'.⁴ At its second congress in July–August 1920, the Comintern therefore set itself the objective of becoming 'the fighting organ of the international proletariat', able to provide a centralized, supra-national form of organization with the authority to intervene directly in the affairs of movements in different countries.⁵ Far from discouraging the Bolsheviks, the ebbing of the first wave of revolution in Europe – from Germany to Poland, passing through Hungary, Austria and then Bohemia and Italy – strengthened their desire to constitute a true general staff of the world revolution; a disciplined army answering to a centralized command. This was the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI).

For the Bolsheviks, long accustomed to clandestine forms of struggle, the case for such an organization was self-evident, but even European

revolutionaries recognized the need for such a body. Accordingly, there was no shortage of applications to join the new Third International. At its Halle congress in October 1920, the majority of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; USPD) voted in favour of the Comintern's '21 conditions' of entry, and for merging with the successor to the Spartacus League. This first success in the formation of a mass communist party – the United Communist Party of Germany (*Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; VKPD), comprising 350,000 members⁶ – was followed a month later by the majority vote in favour of affiliation to the Comintern at the Tours congress of the French Socialists (*Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière*; SFIO). Elsewhere, the Comintern's ability to win over the majority of established socialist parties proved limited. Even so, a process of schism within the labour movement – regarded by the Bolsheviks as the first step in the foundation of a genuine communist party – was undertaken everywhere; by 1921, the Comintern could not simply be dismissed as a militant sect separate from the masses.

Nevertheless most of the fledgling workers' parties were some way from being 'true communist parties' in the sense understood by the Russian revolutionaries. Reporting on the VKPD's unification congress, the ECCI delegate noted 'excellent revolutionary workers who were in no way inferior to the Spartacists, who had fought with them on all the barricades in the civil war'; but he also suggested that there had 'come into the party a large number of former functionaries for whom it was easier to accept all the [Comintern's] theses than to lead a revolutionary action'. Beyond Germany, leaders recently won over to communism held to a highly abstract notion of what their new allegiance entailed. Finding ample scope for his irony in the subject, Radek wrote that many of them thought it would be 'sufficient every now and then to send their greetings on a postcard' in order to take advantage of the communist label which had recently become so 'fashionable'.⁷ Certain leaders, like the Frenchman Marcel Cachin, hoped their admission to the Comintern would enable them to 'modify the articles of statutes which will stand condemned by experience'.⁸ Contrary to such calculations, however, the '21 conditions' were meant neither as a propaganda text nor even as an attempt to adapt old socialist principles to the demands of a new epoch. Rather, they provided the founding text for the parties of a 'new type' and the constitutional core of a supranational organization.

The ECCI,⁹ which assumed direction of the Comintern between world congresses, enjoyed extensive power following the adoption of

resolutions that imposed on national sections the exclusion of individuals, groups or even parties violating international discipline.¹⁰ To establish a continuous link between the centre and periphery, the ECCI had by the end of the second world congress asked each communist party to send a representative to Moscow who would be permanently resident there. For its part, the ECCI adopted the practice of regularly dispatching emissaries to the national sections, authorized to defend – indeed to impose – the Comintern ‘line’ during national party congresses in the event of a political crisis, or in preparation of a major action. In the main, the Comintern’s emissaries were foreign activists who had fled to Russia to escape repression in their own countries; hence, at least in the early years, there were a high proportion of Poles, Hungarians and Bulgarians acting as the ECCI’s representatives ‘abroad’. Integrated into the Comintern apparatus and directly dependent on it, these were vanquished revolutionaries who nevertheless enjoyed considerable political authority and personified the supranational dimension that lay at the root of the Comintern project. Even so, from the very beginning, criticisms of Moscow’s *éminences grises* from within the European parties were apparent and would increase.¹¹ ‘It is a system of secret societies,’ Levi wrote in a text destined to crystallize these tensions. ‘They never work with the leaderships of the national parties, but always behind them or, more often, against them. They have Moscow’s confidence, the others do not.’¹²

Putting such a structure in place took time, passed through more than one phase and formed distinct chronologies according to the national context. Nevertheless, it was in 1921 – between the Livorno congress of the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*; PSI) and the Comintern’s third world congress – that the process of subordinating the national sections to the ECCI really got underway. The expulsion of Paul Levi, chairman of the largest communist party outside Russia and the leader on whom hopes of extending the revolution in Europe still rested, was its climacteric. It is this crucial and too often neglected turning point that will be discussed next.

Two conceptions of communism

Born in Galicia in 1885, Karl Radek had been involved in both the German and Polish social democratic movements before emerging as a leading Bolshevik after 1917. Passing for a Russian in Germany and a German in Russia (at least according to Heinrich Brandler), Radek

functioned as a mentor to the German party from 1919 to 1923, in addition to his responsibilities within the ECCI.¹³ In April 1921, it therefore fell to him to publish a highly partisan text justifying Paul Levi's expulsion from the VKPD. Deliberately confusing a debate over ideas with personal polemics, its thesis was that Levi had always represented – in the guise of 'Spartacism' – a political tradition that was alien to communism (in its Russian form of Bolshevism). This, instead, was supposed to have been represented in the German case by the International Socialists of Germany (*Internationale Sozialisten Deutschlands*; ISD) grouped around Julian Borchardt in Berlin and the Bremen radicals, who included Radek alongside Johann Knief and Paul Fröhlich.¹⁴ Radek's argument was to be endorsed not only by Trotsky,¹⁵ but also Curt Geyer, the German party's representative to the ECCI.¹⁶ Subsequently, it was to be incorporated into the East German historiography¹⁷ and, frequently, that of the West too.¹⁸ The fact remains that such a thesis had very little foundation in reality.

A socialist lawyer close to Rosa Luxemburg, Levi got to know Radek and the principal Bolshevik leaders in Switzerland during the First World War. As a member of the Zimmerwald left and the Spartacist leadership, the man who in March 1919 was to emerge as head of the VKPD leadership was 'already Bolshevik' in Lenin's view in 1916.¹⁹ It was Levi who in 1918 managed to convince Luxemburg not to publish her prison writings on the Russian Revolution. These had reproached the Bolsheviks for wanting to 'recommend for the emulation of the international working class' tactics forced on them by their own 'fatal conditions'.²⁰ It was Levi too who convinced her not to oppose Radek's participation in the founding congress of the KPD as the Bolshevik emissary, arriving in Germany in November 1918. Opposed like Radek to the lure of insurrection in January 1919, Levi first distanced himself from him during his bitter struggle against a leftist current that advocated boycotting elections and the abandonment of the trade unions. Radek himself did not agree with these leftists, who after their exclusion from the party in October 1920 went on to form the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*; KAPD). Supported by Lenin, he did however regret the way in which Levi had provoked the split in the party. Even so, the disagreement at this stage centred primarily on Levi's timing. When Zinoviev sought a rapprochement with the KAPD at the Comintern's second congress against the unanimous view of the German party leadership, Radek opposed him even at the cost of resigning his post as ECCI secretary.

The first public sign of political discord between Radek and Levi did not directly concern Germany but the interpretation of the Bavarian and Hungarian revolutions. In Levi's view, these were artificial putsches that were doomed to failure from the outset.²¹ For Radek, however, the Hungarian communists, like their Bavarian counterparts, were right to take part, as 'we need to be where the working class is in conflict ... whether that means winning the day or suffering a defeat'. This was a fine declaration of revolutionary faith, intended in part to dress the wounds of Hungarian communists suffering violent repression at home, but entirely at odds with the restraint shown by him during the German 'week of blood' in January 1919. First and foremost, Radek was seeking to cover himself on his left and to silence those like the Hungarian Béla Kun who accused him of revolutionary pessimism, by giving the somewhat superficial impression that there existed profound disagreements between him and Levi. Nevertheless, Radek knew well enough how to wax satirical regarding 'political schemers' who 'only want to fight if they have a certificate guaranteeing victory', and could embellish his utterances with voluntarist phrases.²² What differentiated him from Levi was more a matter of style than analysis: the nuances of interpretation. Aware of the confidence that Levi enjoyed among former USPD members²³ Radek personally intervened to persuade him not to relinquish his political responsibilities as he had repeatedly hinted he intended to.²⁴

Although divergence between them had been apparent at the time of the VKPD's unification congress, this had related solely to the question of how best to effect a fusion – Levi wishing to preserve a connection between former Spartacists within the new party²⁵ – and not in any sense that of party strategy. In the weeks following the congress, moreover, Radek and Levi began a collaboration which showed that with regard to the German situation there was convergence which went beyond these venomous little exchanges and personal rivalries. Unlike the Russians, both were convinced that the revolution in Europe was on the wane and, on 8 January 1921, they published in *Die Rote Fahne* the famous 'open letter' to socialist and trade union organizations which constituted the first formulation of the united front.²⁶ Subsequently, Radek tried to show that Levi had always preferred an 'opportunistic' interpretation of the united front, but such allegations were simply a *post hoc* attempt to imbue the clash between them with ideological meaning and lacked any real foundation. Their conceptions appear particularly close if they are compared with those of their adversaries; within the German leadership, there was anything but a

unanimous stance. While former USPD members spoke of a 'superficial tactic'²⁷ and Fröhlich of opportunism, a new left wing, concentrated in Berlin around Arkadi Maslov and Ruth Fischer, put the 'open letter' at the heart of their political criticisms. For this reason, and although they had the support of Brandler and Clara Zetkin, Radek and Levi needed to present a united front. Even if there were slight differences between them, as Radek claimed, these rapidly diminished once they had to defend themselves against their detractors. While there were certainly two conceptions of communism in Germany, these did not separate Radek from Levi. On the contrary, they brought them together in the face of all those in Germany and, above all, in Moscow who refused to accept the idea that the post-war revolutionary wave in Europe had now retreated. Thus, if Radek and Levi offered the same analysis of the German situation, if their objectives were the same and they supported the same political strategy, how can we explain the vicious altercation that took place between them in the weeks that immediately followed?

Contemporary witnesses speak of personal rivalries, of jealousy, of irreconcilable differences of character. What Radek allegedly detested in Levi was not his politics, 'but his culture, his family environment and his self-assurance – all things of which he had himself been deprived'.²⁸ There is no doubt that due to his social origin, education and tastes, Levi had from the start made many personal enemies in the party: 'There are all the hidden partisans of the KAPD who have never forgiven him certain phrases from the Heidelberg period,' Zetkin informed Zinoviev in 1921, 'to say nothing of all those leaders whom Paul [Levi] has wounded at least once in exercising his wit and his irony at their expense.'²⁹ Levi had always cultivated his originality, and it would prove easy for Radek to reproach him with being a 'bourgeois dilettante' playing the part of a revolutionary; 'a thinker more than a fighter', one 'incapable of stirring the mass of comrades' and lacking a spirit of sacrifice.³⁰ All this formed part of the truth, but there is no making sense of their dispute except within the more general context of relations between the Comintern's national sections and the ECCI. At that level, and at that level only, can the key be found to the subsequent clash between them. This, moreover, was not so much a struggle between Levi and Radek as between Levi and the Comintern, with Radek as its representative in Germany.

Already in January 1921, relations between Levi and the ECCI were marked by strong mutual suspicion. Zinoviev, after the Halle congress, had restarted the process of fusion with the 'leftists' so as 'to add to the

safe and correct line of the German party a little of the revolutionary élan which ... exists to a more significant degree within the KAPD'.³¹ A KAPD delegation had been invited to Moscow in November 1920 and, despite severe criticism of its political line, had obtained from the ECCI the status of a 'sympathizing' party. But although such an arrangement received unanimous support within the German leadership, Levi nevertheless denounced such an 'intolerable situation' with a lavish irony that 'praised' the 'strokes of genius' shown by the ECCI.³²

At around the same time, the ECCI instructed Radek to push through a structural reorganization of the VKPD, which was clearly aimed at breaking down the distinguishing features of the new party's two components. The ECCI, insisting on the removal of the majority of district secretaries, managed to overcome the resistance of Levi and former USPD leaders by the use of financial threats.³³ In the short term, things went no further; but it is highly probable that from this moment on those around Zinoviev within the ECCI foresaw the necessity of constructing a new German party leadership. Radek, and in due course all communist literature, would seek to justify this in the political terms of 'left' against 'right' and 'revolutionaries' against 'opportunists'. Levi, however, was no more to the right than Brandler and Zetkin, or even Radek himself for that matter. He was, on the other hand, less disposed than they were to tolerate the direct intervention of the ECCI in the internal affairs of the German party.

On one point at least Radek saw things clearly: 'It is purely by chance that the conflict broke out at the time of the Italian affair. It would have happened in any case.'³⁴ Yet this did not reflect divergences over their conception of communism in Germany, but contradictory views of the proper relations between the national sections and the ECCI. By virtue of their different political functions, Radek and Levi in this respect belonged firmly in two different camps, as the Italian question would confirm.

The Italian crisis of the German leadership

The first serious dispute between Levi and the ECCI broke out at the time of the Livorno congress of the PSI, which Levi attended from 15 January 1921 as the German party representative. Some 200,000 members strong, and hence the most powerful party after the Germans, the PSI included within its ranks a spectrum of political tendencies. These ranged from the leftism of Amadeo Bordiga, who had played his part in the hardening of the Comintern's '21 conditions' of

membership, to the avowed reformism of Filippo Turati.³⁵ Somewhere in between was the so-called 'unity communist' tendency of Giacinto Serrati, who was backed by 60 per cent of the delegates. Serrati accepted the '21 conditions' but wished to retain the right to decide the appropriate moment for a split, holding firmly that it was possible to win for communism some of the activists still attached to Turati. Levi did not dispute the need for a split, but hoped that this would run between Serrati and Turati, not Serrati and those to his left, and with it the loss of more than two-thirds of the party's members. Before leaving for Livorno, Levi had reached agreement on his line with Radek, who approved it so as to avoid any conflict between them in the event of disagreement with the representatives of the ECCI, the character of whose instructions was then unknown.³⁶

On their arrival in Italy, the German delegation was horrified by the attitude of the two Comintern representatives. One of them was Mátyás Rákosi, a former political commissar in the Hungarian Soviet Republic; the other was Khristo Kabaktchiev, of Romanian origin and later to become secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Privately, Rákosi told Zetkin that he meant 'to set an example at Livorno, for other parties like the French party contain undesirable elements ... A communist party must not be composed of recruits but only of soldiers ... Besides, the German party has got too big, it needs to become smaller again.' To Zetkin it was incomprehensible that 'in such a difficult and delicate situation, the ECCI entrusts its delegation to Livorno to a man like Rak[osi] who would make a good representative of a sect but who has nothing about him of the political leader'. An interview with Kabakchiev confirmed the Germans' fears: 'A split with the Serrati group is the objective of the CI.'³⁷

With the agreement of the two ECCI delegates, Levi met Serrati who told him that, in the present context of conflict with the Fascists, any separation from Turati, whose prestige remained immense, would be highly risky. Levi worked hard to find a compromise, redoubling his friendly pressure on Serrati and putting the ECCI delegates on their guard without ever denying the necessity for a split or questioning their authority. Kabakchiev's intervention, a report of 26 pages 'almost exclusively directed against Serrati', had a disastrous effect on an assembly already bristling against the ECCI's *éminences grises*. The following day, while Levi had to return to Germany, Serrati's supporters refused to back the resolution excluding Turati, though all the while insisting on their desire to remain within the Comintern. Hence was born the Communist Party of Italy (*Partito Comunista d'Italia*; PCD'I),

but without the 100,000 'unity communists' who were forced into a split. On his return to Germany, Levi nevertheless seemed convinced that this was not a definitive rupture, but rather a case of misunderstanding that the ECCI could sort out by sending a new emissary to Italy.³⁸

Contrary to such hopes, the ECCI delegates had not exceeded their mandates: a telegram from Moscow, arriving the day after Levi left for Livorno, confirmed that the Comintern had indeed determined to oppose Serrati.³⁹ It is true that a misunderstanding existed, but according to Radek it was purely an issue of the German leadership's duty of solidarity with the ECCI, and not any difference of interpretation regarding the Italian situation. Publicly, Radek defended the split on the basis of an analysis of Serrati and his supporters representing an opportunist tendency akin to the German 'centrists'.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, several references suggest that no less than Levi he disapproved of the setting up of a minority communist party susceptible to the influence of the Left. However, the essential thing for Radek, who unlike Levi or Serrati had no institutional legitimacy other than that derived from Moscow, was to maintain the authority of the ECCI. In several parties, acerbic comments were increasingly to be heard regarding 'Turkestanis' or 'Moscow's leather boots';⁴¹ shadowy figures allegedly conspiring behind the backs of national party leaderships in the executive's name.⁴² Radek, however, was insistent in locating the debate within the sole perspective of the ECCI's relations with the national sections. This was a risky option since it helped confirm the subordination of the sections to the centre, whose decisions were nevertheless often in contradiction with Radek's own analyses. Nevertheless, Radek accepted the consequences of this. After all, he believed that the whole machinery of the Comintern, and hence his own authority in Germany, depended on it.

Personally summoned by Radek, Levi defended himself from wanting to ascribe responsibility for the split to the ECCI. He considered that mistakes could still be corrected, but only if this came from Moscow, for 'any proposition or criticism on our part can change nothing, but on the contrary may darken our relations with the executive to no purpose'. Levi concluded by asking if either the ECCI or Radek (as its delegate in Germany) wished him to relinquish his post as party chairman.⁴³ On this occasion Radek no longer took issue with the disaster that had occurred at Livorno. Nevertheless, he put the view that the 'polemic which sets him against Levi relates less to a differing interpretation of the Italian situation than to the question of relations

with the CI'. Radek defended himself from favouring a 'blind allegiance to the executive'. On the other hand, as he put it, 'there is criticism and criticism', and the Comintern could not tolerate the 'scepticism' towards it that was emerging within the western parties. Besides, the mistakes that had occurred arose in part from the weak participation of national sections in the ECCI's work and 'the German party, which is the largest party in the International after the Russian party, has to bear its own share of the responsibility'. Levi began his reply by stressing his general agreement with Radek's analyses, his refusal to identify himself with Serrati and his acceptance of the break with Turati. Even so, he too implicitly recognized that relations between the ECCI and the national sections were at the root of the problem: 'We are confronted with a certain distrust and any attempt on our part to criticize a mistake by the executive is interpreted as a display of opposition towards the CI.' Levi was not bold enough to pursue this line of debate. Radek, in response, reminded him of the duty of solidarity. For while, the tension seemed to ease and the German leadership managed to adopt unanimously a compromise resolution approving the decisions of the ECCI, while looking to the PCD'I's absorption of the communist elements within the Serrati group still in the PSI.⁴⁴

Beyond the German party leadership, the left denounced the drift to opportunism. More than that, however, it was the ECCI which began to fear for its authority when it learnt that Serrati had travelled to Germany to hold discussions with Levi in Berlin, and then with Zetkin in Hamburg.⁴⁵ Serrati's criticisms of the *éminences grises* of the ECCI found numerous echoes, not only in Germany but also in France, Yugoslavia and Austria.⁴⁶ Though it is difficult to believe that Levi really envisaged leading a revolt against the ECCI in Serrati's company, the executive hardened its stance as it began to feel its power coming under threat. Passing through Berlin, Rákosi – claiming to have new information – demanded that the German leadership adopt a further resolution on the Italian question.⁴⁷ According to Zetkin, his report contained no new revelation, but August Thalheimer and Walter Stoecker agreed to present a resolution fully backing Rákosi's position. This resolution was rejected by a large majority at the leadership meeting of 16 February, but six days later was adopted by the central committee by 28 votes to 23.⁴⁸ Refusing to take responsibility for such a position, five members of the leadership preferred to resign voluntarily. These included the two presidents, Levi and Ernst Däumig, as well as Clara Zetkin. In voting for Rákosi's resolution, the new German

leadership recognized that it had no difference in principle with Levi, but stated its intention of cooperating loyally with the ECCI.⁴⁹ It hence confirmed the fact of the German party's submission to the decisions of the Comintern. No future German leadership ever succeeded in reversing this. There was to be no way out of the web in which it was now caught.

A question of discipline

The coincidence in timing between Russia's adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the Kronstadt rising and the German March Action led contemporaries to conjecture that the Bolsheviks may have wished to 'force' events in Europe a little, shielding the Soviet regime from the painful turn to the NEP and erasing the affront of Kronstadt. Though such an idea must have crossed the minds of some of the Russian leaders, notably Zinoviev, it was the absence of a clear political line which more than anything characterized the ECCI's position during the dramatic weeks of February–March 1921. Its meetings of 21–23 February, with the participation of Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek, Kun and August Guralski, were wholly devoted to the German question. Geyer, who had just arrived in Russia to represent the VKPD on the ECCI, gave a very critical account of these proceedings: 'The German situation was not examined as a political leadership ought to have examined it, but to the contrary was dealt with as a supervisory body might have [done].' The main purpose of the proceedings was to deal with the 'defects of the German leadership' and its 'right-wing orientation'. Conversely, the putschist tactic of the KAPD had the support of the majority of the ECCI. Guralski, supported by Bukharin and Zinoviev, was convinced that the German masses were ready, with a little encouragement, to respond by force of arms to any attack from the extreme right. Radek rejected the view that the communists would have the backing of the masses if they threw themselves into partial struggles.⁵⁰ Thanks to Lenin's support, he managed to prevent the ECCI's endorsement of what was subsequently to be dubbed the theory of the offensive.

Hence, when at the end of February 1921 the three ECCI representatives – Kun, Guralski and Jozsef Pogány – left for Germany, they had not received any precise details of their mission, at least in the sense of immediate action.⁵¹ Even so, all were unconditional advocates of the theory of the offensive and, in carrying the mandate of the ECCI, none dared imagine that their slogans to this effect did not have Zinoviev's

support. Besides, the circumstances were highly favourable to them. Kun expected to meet with strong resistance but, since the Levi group's resignation and its replacement by men such as Fröhlich, Ernst Meyer and Hugo Eberlein, the leadership was distinctly oriented to the left. Kun therefore set upon a veritable campaign to explain to the Germans his theory of the offensive.⁵² The prospect of a plebiscite over Upper Silesia, where for several months Polish troops had clashed with the German Freikorps, served as a pretext for the party's mobilization. However, it was the social democratic governor of Prussian Saxony, Otto Hörsing, who propelled the communists to their fate by declaring his intention of having the police occupy the industrial strongholds of Halle and Mansfield. On 18 March, *Die Rote Fahne* issued an appeal (attributed to Kun), which symbolized the break now claimed by the Left: 'The working class must take up the challenge. Every worker must set aside the law and lay hold of arms wherever he can.'⁵³ On 20 March, *Die Rote Fahne* then issued an ultimatum to independent and social democratic workers: 'Those who are not with us are against us.'⁵⁴ These watchwords of the VKPD leadership were welcomed enthusiastically by the KAPD. At the same time, they created an insurmountable barrier with non-communist workers and even a proportion of the party's own sympathizers. The call for a general strike by the VKPD on 24 March was hence a complete failure. Cut off from the masses, the party withdrew its instructions on 31 March. The number of insurgents killed in central Germany was 145; the number of arrests approached 4,000, including numerous party cadres.⁵⁵ In the weeks which followed, the VKPD lost more than half its members.

Radek, in his correspondence, conceded the possibility that the March movement did not result from the spontaneous action of the masses, as the German leadership always insisted, but – precisely as Levi claimed – from the actions of the party. Radek also spoke in terms of a 'precipitate movement' and 'tactical error'.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he refused to stake his distance from the German party: 'I can understand your reasons ... and even if the affair ends in defeat ... it was emphatically necessary to act. Moreover, I believe that in every case this will lead to advances for the party.'⁵⁷ This was not an analysis shared by Levi. Returning to Berlin sufficiently early to appreciate the scale of the disaster, Levi decided to ask Lenin to act as arbiter and wrote to him on 27 March: 'The present leadership will lead the party into total collapse in six months' time at the latest.' Assuming that Lenin might not be properly informed regarding the recent events, he provided him with an account of the talks he had had with Kun, noting his insistence that

'Russia was in a very difficult situation' and that 'the German party had to pass immediately to action'. Levi ended by stressing his willingness to rely on Lenin's judgement, but also announced his intention of writing a pamphlet expressing his own point of view.⁵⁸ He did not wait for Lenin's response and his *Unser Weg. Wider den Putschismus* ('Our Way: Against Putschism') was completed on 4 April. The key point in his view concerned the relationship of the communists to the proletariat. In this regard there were two possible responses. One was that offered by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, according to which the communists had no separate interests from those of the workers, who were the real makers of the revolution. The other was that of Bakunin, Nachaev and Blanqui, adopted in March by the new German leadership, according to which a conscious minority could determine the fate of the proletariat. Responsibility for this was not just down to the German leadership and Levi took care not to accuse the ECCI directly, noting that 'this would not be the first time that the executive's delegates had exceeded their mandate'. Henceforth, however, he refused to gloss over the issue of the system of delegates which, since the split at Livorno, had acquired such a fundamental significance: 'It is a system which saps the confidence necessary for mutual collaboration between the executive and the member parties'. He wrote:

These comrades [the delegates] are for the most part unfitted for political leadership and unworthy of [our] confidence. Our present desolate state is the result of the absence of true political leadership at the top. The only thing which the executive currently succeeds in doing is to send out recall messages that arrive too late and excommunications that arrive too early. Such a manner of leading the Communist International can give rise to nothing unless it is further catastrophes.⁵⁹

For some days it appears that Lenin strove not to embitter the debate. Several accounts speak of his pressure on Radek not to publish an incendiary pamphlet entitled 'The Renegade Levi'.⁶⁰ However, being totally immersed in domestic political issues, the Bolshevik leader had no time for the problems of the German party and by the time he got round to replying to Levi it was already too late. In any case, Lenin's basic position was not so very different from Radek's and already heralded the compromise that would be adopted at the Comintern's third world congress in the summer of 1921. Lenin recognized the possibility 'that a representative of the ECCI might have proposed an idiotic,

leftist tactic of immediate action "to help the Russians"⁶¹. Nevertheless, he unequivocally condemned Levi's resignation from the leadership – in his view 'an unforgivable error' – and, above all, the publication of his pamphlet, which he argued could have no other outcome than to exacerbate the differences that already existed.⁶² The discussion of the March Action hence gave rise to the same line of division as the debate over the Italian question. Levi wanted a debate on the foundations and tactics of communism in Germany and on the lessons of the March Action in its own right. The Bol-shevik leaders threw back at him 'discipline', 'duty of solidarity' and 'patriotism of the party'. This time, however, Levi wanted to see things through and secure a repudiation of the methods of the ECCI, not simply the criticism of a few 'irresponsible' individuals.

The opening up of such a question was something that no Bolshevik leader, however appreciative of Levi's qualities, could entertain in the midst of the most serious crisis yet in the history of Soviet Russia. On the contrary, Radek's view was that it was necessary to take advantage of the 'crystallization of the right'⁶³ to confirm a process set in motion by the ECCI almost three months earlier, aiming at the formation of 'a leading group which wants to fight and which the party is ready to follow'.⁶⁴ On 4 April, therefore, the ECCI condemned the resignation of Levi and his supporters in the German leadership without so much as mentioning the March Action. Two days later, it finally set out its position by congratulating the VKPD on having 'turned a new page in the history of the German working class'.⁶⁵ On 15 April, Levi was expelled from the VKPD for having 'broken revolutionary discipline' by publishing, 'without the agreement of the leading bodies' and 'before the battle had even finished', a pamphlet containing 'false assertions' and 'grave suspicions in regard to the leadership of the party'.⁶⁶ A *Rote Fahne* editorial given over to Levi's expulsion focused solely on the issue of discipline:

A fighting organization like the communist party cannot exist without iron discipline. Levi undermined this discipline from within. And if this discipline has to be respected by every soldier in the party, this is ten times truer of those ... who are in full view of the party and its enemies ... On breaking with Levi, the party does not break merely with a personality and a leader, it breaks with a whole past conception of discipline which was not sufficiently strong.⁶⁷

In response, Levi asked the central committee: 'Which is the crime? The March Action or the criticism made of it?'⁶⁸ He reaffirmed his desire to discuss the March Action and not just the question of discipline, but allowed himself a note of irony regarding the bad faith of his interlocutors: on the eve of insurrection in October 1917, he pointed out, Zinoviev himself had resigned from the Bolshevik central committee and Lenin had made public the polemics between them! Though Levi's expulsion was confirmed by the KPD central committee, he carried on the fight through his editorship of a quarterly review, *Sowjet*, published outside of the party.⁶⁹ Those around Levi were not the only ones who deplored the inadequacy of a purely disciplinary procedure. At the other end of the political spectrum, Maslov, Fischer and Ernst Reuter, supported in the leadership by Fröhlich and Thalheimer, wished to secure a disavowal of the Radek-Levi 'open letter' and a condemnation of the theses on the stabilization of capitalism in the West. In their estimation, so very different from Levi's, both were symptoms of the Comintern's opportunism.⁷⁰

The third world congress took place in a far more strained atmosphere than its predecessors. Criticisms were heard from all sides. The German leadership, supported not only by the Italians, but also by Kun and Rákosi, denounced the swing to the right of the Russian party and the Comintern. The KAPD's strictures against 'the dictatorship of Moscow', carrying on from those of Levi and Serrati against the *éminences grises* and the 'new cheka', found many echoes among the delegates. Even before any discussion could take place, the ECCI demanded a vote of confidence on its overall balance sheet. This, in effect, meant endorsing without debate the Livorno split, the March Action and Levi's expulsion. Any reference to the ECCI's mistakes was immediately construed as bringing into question the authority of the Comintern, but if critics sought to bring up the mode of functioning of the executive they were accused of opportunism. Once again, disciplinary measures served the purposes of the political line. Despite the criticisms made, the congress resolutions upheld the compromise previously worked out by the Russian leadership: the theory of the offensive was condemned without any disavowal of the March Action, and the tactic of the united front was sanctioned as an exemplary initiative.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the essential fragility of the compromise became apparent with the appointment of the 'small bureau' of the executive, the body which was progressively replacing itself for the ECCI and which in the following month would be formalized under the title of ECCI Presidium.⁷² Of the bureau's seven members, five at least

(Zinoviev, Bukharin, Kun, Fritz Heckert and Egidio Gennari) were closer to the theses of the left than to the line of the united front; Radek and Boris Souvarine were the only exceptions. The underlying pattern was nevertheless clear. Far from envisaging a modification of the relations between the national sections and the ECCI, the third congress had reinforced the existing balance of forces favouring the executive.⁷³ This tendency was to be further accentuated the following year when the politburo of the Russian party took the decision to increase its representatives on the ECCI.⁷⁴

Conclusion: a step towards Stalinization?

Despite its significance, no specific term to describe the turn taken by the Comintern in 1921 can be found in either the academic or the partisan literature. With the exception of Richard Löwenthal, who sought – as Radek had – to demonstrate the incompatibility of the Spartacist tradition and Bolshevism, most authors apply the term Bolshevization to the period beginning in 1924.⁷⁵ For the most part, these authors also stress that this more than anything was a matter of the ‘Stalinization’ of the Comintern. Nevertheless, despite the fact that nobody used such language at the time – they spoke instead of the need to establish ‘authentic communist parties’ – the process undertaken during the course of 1921 can certainly be characterized as a process of ‘Bolshevization’, to the extent that it effected the alignment of the national sections with the organizational principles and *modus operandi* of the Russian party. Such a process of ‘disciplinarization’ did not inevitably imply the ‘Stalinization’ that was to follow, but it did help make it possible by establishing subordination to the decisions of the ECCI. In the short term, the adoption of the tactic outlined in the ‘open letter’ – a tactic that matched the aspirations of the rank-and-file in several countries – seemed to guarantee to the different parties a form of politics conforming better to national specificities and the actual tempo of the European revolution. Nevertheless, the political line could easily be changed, and would be on numerous occasions. The subordination of the sections to the ECCI, on the other hand, could never be brought into question; on the contrary, it was only further accentuated.

Notes

- 1 M.-L. Goldbach, *Karl Radek und die deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen, 1918–23* (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1973), p. 138.
- 2 P. Levi, *Unser Weg – Wider den Putschismus* (Berlin: A. Seehof, 1921), p. 56.

- 3 *Der II. Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale: Protokoll der Verhandlungen vom 19. Juli in Petrograd und vom 23. Juli bis 7. August 1920 in Moskau* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, 1921), p. 193.
- 4 K. Radek, *Soll die VKPD eine Massenpartei der revolutionären Aktion oder eine zentristischen Partei des Wartens sein?* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, 1921), p. 56.
- 5 *Der II. Kongress der KI*, p. 193.
- 6 *Protokoll des III. Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale* (Hamburg: Carl Hoym, 1921), p. 457.
- 7 Radek, *Soll die VKPD*, pp. 6–7, 56.
- 8 D. Pechanski (ed.), *Marcel Cachin. Carnets 1906–47* (Paris: CNRS, 1993–98), p. 602.
- 9 Created by decision of the first Comintern congress, the executive until 1922 comprised delegates nominated by the national communist parties. From the fourth congress, however, the ECCI was elected directly by the congress.
- 10 G. M. Adibekov and E. N. Shakhnazarova, *Comintern Organizational Structures* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997), p. 20.
- 11 P. Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), p. 469.
- 12 Levi, *Unser Weg*, p. 55.
- 13 J.-F. Fayet, *Karl Radek (1885–1939): Biographie politique* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).
- 14 Radek, *Soll die VKPD*.
- 15 P. Broué, *Revolution en Allemagne* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1971), p. 833.
- 16 C. Geyer, *Die revolutionäre Illusion. Zur Geschichte des linken Flügels der USPD. Erinnerungen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag, 1976), p. 228.
- 17 A. Reisberg, *Lenin und die Aktionseinheit in Deutschland* (Berlin: Dietz, 1964), p. 87.
- 18 Pierre Broué is among the few authors to contest this thesis, in 'Paul Levi ou l'occasion manquée', *Revolution en Allemagne*, p. 833.
- 19 V. I. Lenin, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 32 (Paris: Editions Sociales, fourth edition), p. 549.
- 20 R. Luxemburg, *La révolution russe* (Paris: Maspéro, 1964), p. 71. This text was not published until 1922, when Levi had been excluded from the party. S. Quack, *Geistig frei und niemandes Knecht, Paul Levi–Rosa Luxemburg. Politische Arbeit und persönliche Beziehung* (Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1983), p. 133.
- 21 P. Levi, 'Die Lehren der ungarischen Revolution', *Die Internationale*, 24 (1920), 32–41.
- 22 K. Radek, 'Die Lehren der ungarischen Revolution', *Die Internationale*, 21 (1920), 58.
- 23 *Protokoll des III. Kongress der KI*, p. 550.
- 24 Radek, *Soll die VKPD*, pp. 104–5.
- 25 W. Brandt and R. Löwenthal, *Ernst Reuter. Ein Leben für die Freiheit. Eine politische Biographie* (München: Kindler, 1957), p. 141.
- 26 'Offener Brief', *Die Rote Fahne*, 8 January 1921.
- 27 Radek, *Soll die VKPD*, p. 24.
- 28 Ypsilon [K. Volk and J. Gumper], *Stalintern* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1948), p. 62.
- 29 Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), C. Zetkin to [Zinoviev], 1 March 1921, f. 528/2/156 doc 7.
- 30 Radek, *Soll die VKPD*, p. 91.
- 31 Broué, *Revolution en Allemagne*, p. 448.

- 32 P. Levi, 'Ein unhaltbare Situation', *Die Rote Fahne*, 24 December 1920.
- 33 Geyer, *Die revolutionäre Illusion*, pp. 234–6.
- 34 Radek, *Soll die VKPD*, p. 35.
- 35 The rupture with Turati was explicitly mentioned in the seventh of the '21 conditions'. The 21st, requiring the expulsion of those not accepting the programme of the Comintern, was moved by Bordiga.
- 36 P. B. [Radek], 'Levi als sein eigener Historiker', *Die Rote Fahne*, 16 April 1921.
- 37 Zetkin to [Zinoviev], 1 March 1921.
- 38 M. Drachkovitch and B. Lazitch, *The Comintern, Historical Highlights: Essays, Recollections, Documents* (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 275–82.
- 39 Broué, *Revolution en Allemagne*, p. 462.
- 40 P. B. [Radek], 'Die Spaltung der italienische sozialistische Partei und die Kommunistische Internationale', *Die Rote Fahne*, 26–27 February 1921.
- 41 Zetkin to [Zinoviev], 1 March 1921.
- 42 J. C. Drabkin, *The Comintern and the Idea of World Revolution* (Moscow: Nauka, 1998), pp. 236–43.
- 43 Archiv der Sozialen Demokratie. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (AdsD), Levi to Radek, 27 July 1921, Nl. Levi, Mappe 13, Box 19, Ads D.
- 44 Drachkovitch and Lazitch, *The Comintern*, pp. 291–3.
- 45 Drabkin, *The Comintern*, pp. 243–4.
- 46 See, for example, J. Mesnil, 'Le congrès de Livourne', *Revue communiste*, 12 (1921), 509–11; Broué, *Revolution en Allemagne*, p. 469.
- 47 Zetkin to [Zinoviev], 1 March 1921.
- 48 *Protokoll des III. Kongress der KI*, p. 285.
- 49 *Die Rote Fahne*, 1 March 1921.
- 50 Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO), C. Geyer to VKPD [undated, 21 April 1921].
- 51 Lenin subsequently declared that Kun had perhaps exceeded his mandate. See Lenin to Levi and Zetkin, 16 April 1921, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Berlin: Hrsg. vom Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 1963), pp. 74–5.
- 52 B. Nicolaevsky, 'Les premières années de l'Internationale communiste, d'après le récit du camarade Thomas', J. Freymond (ed.), *Contributions à l'Histoire du Comintern* (Genève: Droz, 1965), p. 25.
- 53 'Klare Antwort', *Die Rote Fahne*, 18 March 1921.
- 54 *Die Rote Fahne*, 20 March 1921.
- 55 S. Weber, *Ein kommunistischer Putsch? Märzaktion 1921 in Mitteldeutschland* (Berlin: Dietz, 1991), pp. 179, 220.
- 56 *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des 2.(7) Parteitages der KPD abgehalten in Jena vom 22 bis 26 August 1921* (Berlin: Hrsg. von der Zentrale der KPD, 1922), p. 175.
- 57 AdsD, Max [Radek] to VKPD, 1 April 1921.
- 58 SAPMO, Levi to Lenin, 27 March 1921, Nl Levi, 126/16, doc. 55–62, SAPMO.
- 59 Levi, *Unser Weg*, pp. 21, 29, 55–6.
- 60 This article was nevertheless to appear as the conclusion to Radek's pamphlet *Soll die VKPD*, pp. 89–119, under the title 'Der Fall Levi'.
- 61 Kun defended himself against the allegation. See Drabkin, *The Comintern*, pp. 266–9.

- 62 Lenin to Levi and Zetkin, 16 April 1921, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 1963, No. 1, pp. 74–5.
- 63 Max [Radek] to VKPD, 1 April 1921.
- 64 RGASPI, Radek to Lenin, 1 June 1921, f. 490/1/148, doc. 21–22.
- 65 Drabkin, *The Comintern*, p. 255.
- 66 *Die Rote Fahne*, 15 April 1921.
- 67 A. Thalheimer, 'Das oberste Gesetz. Zum Ausschluss Paul Levi aus der Partei', *Die Rote Fahne*, 15 April 1921.
- 68 P. Levi, *Was ist das Verbrechen? Die Märzaktion oder die Kritik daran? Rede aus der Sitzung des Zentralausschusses der VKPD am 4. Mai 1921* (Berlin: Seehof, 1921).
- 69 *Sowjet*, 1 May 1921.
- 70 Broué, *Revolution en Allemagne*, p. 504.
- 71 *Thèses, manifestes et résolutions adoptés par les Ier, IIème, IIIème et IVème congrès de l'Internationale communiste, 1919–23* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1970), pp. 140–1.
- 72 It had been established on the recommendation of the Russian party in July 1919. See G. M. Adibekov and E. N. Shakhnazarova, *Comintern*, p. 8.
- 73 *Thèses, manifestes et résolutions*, p. 120.
- 74 RGASPI, Compte-rendu du BP du PCR[b], 1 November 1922, f.17/3/320.
- 75 R. Löwenthal, 'The Bolshevisation of the Spartacus League', in D. Footman (ed.), *International Communism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), pp. 23–71.

7

‘Kings among their subjects’? Ernst Thälmann, Harry Pollitt and the Leadership Cult as Stalinization

Norman LaPorte and Kevin Morgan

The cogency and distinctiveness of Weber’s original concept of Stalinization lay in its precision. At a general level, several defining features of the Stalinized communist parties could already be regarded as axiomatic. Disciplined and centralized, according to the precepts of democratic centralism, through the projection of these characteristics internationally these parties always accepted the ultimate authority of the Communist International (Comintern) and explicitly prioritized the interests of the Soviet Union. Few now question that there is more to the history of communism than this. Nevertheless, as a description of its organizational *modus operandi* these issues are no more the subject of serious contention than the dates – ever sparser – of Comintern congresses or the location of its headquarters in Moscow. The problem with much historical literature on communist parties, even in quite sophisticated variants, is how much of it fails to get beyond such description and its thickening into narrative. Stalinism, conceived as this relationship of centralization and subordination, continues to be seen as providing both description and explanation – which means, in the last analysis, that nothing is explained. Easy exposition leads to easy refutation, and debates within the literature not infrequently have a ritualistic character. The strength of Weber’s Stalinization thesis, on the other hand, lay in a genuine sense of process, a rigorous sense of periodization and the careful delineation of both determining and contingent factors. It is precisely this attention to the timing and weighting of different explanatory variables that lends itself to meaningful comparison. Weber’s work has sometimes been criticized for the limited character of what it sought to explain. However, in accounting for the political subordination of the communist parties to Moscow – and this, after all, is no peripheral issue – his *Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus* remains a key point of reference.

A conspicuous manifestation of the Stalinization process was the emergence of a single dominant leading figure: usually, after Stalin's example, the general secretary.¹ From Borkenau's commentaries of the 1930s, through Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956, the cult of these individuals provided both an epitome of centralization and a feature apparently distinguishing the Stalinist party from 'Leninism' or 'Bolshevism'.² Throughout the Comintern, Stalin's ascendancy in 1929–30 was confirmed by the sweeping aside of established party leaders and the installation of a new leadership cohort. Indistinctly at first, there emerged at the head of their parties figures like Maurice Thorez in France, Klement Gottwald in Czechoslovakia and Earl Browder in the US. The German Ernst Thälmann and the Englishman Harry Pollitt – subjects of the present study – can also be grouped with this 'Stalin generation' of party leaders, though Thälmann has the additional interest of providing a prototype and exemplar for the others.³ Except through death or imprisonment, these figures remained in position throughout the Comintern period, and in most cases until after Stalin's death. Where previously the leadership of Comintern sections had to varying degrees been characterized by factionalism and discontinuity, the closed character of democratic centralism now encouraged the perpetuation of leaders at once enjoying Stalin's favour and holding whatever levers of patronage and power existed at a national level. Privately, the centralization of communications, including encrypted wireless messages, accentuated central authority through the control of information. Publicly, communist parties competed with other political formations in exploiting the charismatic or symbolic attributes of personal authority. As Marc Lazar observes, these ritualized cults can call to mind Hannah Arendt's notion of the totalitarian leader, magically defending the movement against the world beyond.⁴

Even so, the whole business was fraught with ambiguity. Stalinization itself was a dynamic process that in its first stages undermined intermediate leadership through anti-bureaucratic rhetoric and the exposure of such leaders' dispensability. Though superficially both party and Comintern apparatus resembled a Michelsian oligarchy, their material and ideological dependency on the Soviet party, strongly emphasized by Weber, subjected them to systematic forms of upward accountability. If there was to be a cult of leadership, Stalin's ideal of a monolithic single will implied that this too should be centred in Moscow, and on the person of Stalin himself. In reality, the issue was more complex.⁵ On the one hand, the hierarchical organization of communist parties set a premium on leadership qualities at every level,

not just at the centre, and the assumption of a 'leading role' towards the world beyond encouraged similar postures even on the part of rank-and-file party activists. At the same time, the stabilization of leadership, at every level, provided a possible resource in the negotiation of relations between individual and party and between party and International. This meant that personalized leadership provided both asset and threat: hence the rationale for the formation of a controlled and Bolshevized leadership cohort, both through the Moscow-based training of the Lenin School, with its dislocation from independent sources of political capital, and through the painstaking construction of biographical filters and control mechanisms.

Moscow's dilemma was that Stalinized leadership structures required the assertion of authority domestically without diluting the concentration of authority in Moscow itself. The tensions that resulted were not always realized or explicitly articulated as such. Instead, they might be likened to the phenomenon of 'little Stalins' threatening the reach of central government within the Soviet Union itself.⁶ With the export of these practices to the post-war people's democracies, it was noticeably the 'strong cults' around Tito, Enver Hoxha and Nicolae Ceaușescu which became most associated with instincts of independence.⁷ Sarah Davies has even suggested that Stalin's ambivalence regarding cultic behaviour was not merely its further manifestation in the guise of modesty, but a sign of his appreciation of its 'double-edged' character.⁸ Already by 1929, Thälmann was being stylized as the 'German Stalin'.⁹ It was equally the logic of Stalinization, however, that there could and should be only one Stalin.

Transnational and diachronic comparators

Thälmann and Pollitt make suitable but complex comparators. Born in 1886 and 1890 respectively, they were representatives of a generation of working-class activists drawn to socialism in the first years of the twentieth century and to communism in the aftermath of war and the Russian revolution. Joining their communist parties from positions of relative obscurity in 1920–21, each then experienced rapid political advancement and by 1924 had risen to political bureau level. At this point, however, their careers diverged significantly. Already appointed vice-chairman of the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) in January 1924, Thälmann survived the subsequent ousting of the leftist Fischer–Maslow leadership and, in September 1925, emerged as party chairman and head of the so-called

pro-Soviet left. Pollitt, by contrast, was thwarted in a factional bid for the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1923. From mid-1924, he functioned instead as general secretary of the National Minority Movement (NMM), the reconstituted British section of the Red International of Labour Unions, and it was not until August 1929 that he attained the leadership of the party itself.

In one sense, the difference in chronology is deceptive. When Pollitt became CPGB general secretary, he could have been under no doubt that the opening arose through changing political circumstances in Moscow¹⁰ and, in the spring of 1929, had been tested with a Comintern mission to the recalcitrant American party. On the other hand, Thälmann, despite his apparent seniority, had had his dependence on the same source of authority publicly demonstrated just the previous year, when Stalin had him reinstated as KPD leader against the overwhelming verdict of the party's central committee. The occasion for the incident was an embezzlement scandal involving Thälmann's right-hand man, John Wittorf. Nevertheless, in this case too the indispensable prerequisite for Moscow's preferment was Thälmann's commitment to the new 'class against class' line. It is in this sense that such figures can be grouped together as agents of Stalinization. 'Now I have the German party in my hand!' Stalin reportedly boasted after the Wittorf affair. The function of leadership figure as transmission belt seems conclusively attested.¹¹

At the same time, differences even of a few years could count for a good deal in the helter-skelter world of the Comintern. Already well established in the 1920s, Thälmann's *Führerkult* pre-dates by several years the international phenomenon of mimetic cults, usually dated from the mid-1930s.¹² The full development of Stalin's own cult is usually traced only from the commemoration of his fiftieth birthday in 1929; fuller articulations like Henri Barbusse's best-selling hagiography appeared only in 1935.¹³ While the synchronicity of political lines like 'class against class' may be unaffected, other cultural or organizational features of the Stalinized party evidently developed a good deal more unevenly. In the precocious development of the Thälmann cult, the KPD may even have provided a sort of model of the Stalinized party. This might then be taken up by other parties like the CPGB, to which by the late 1920s the German party extended systematic mentorship and oversight.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the promotion of a Thälmann-style cult in Britain dates only from after the KPD's suppression by the Nazis and the imprisonment of Thälmann himself. This not only meant adapting the

cult to a very different social and political environment; it meant doing so as the instrument of a popular front-style of politics, in a period in which the centralized communications of the Stalinization model became significantly atrophied through terror and neglect. The comparison between Thälmann and Pollitt is thus both diachronic, between the 'third period' and the popular front, and transnational. Indeed, the two aspects are indistinguishable. Because the contrasting fortunes of their two parties were so closely bound up with distinct phases of Comintern history, any satisfactory comparison between them has to take account of these variations over time.

Within the present constraints of space, only certain aspects of the question can be examined here. First, we look at class and, more specifically, the common working-class credentials required of the ideal-type Stalinist leader. Then we look at faction, whether as a rationale for such forms of leadership or as a constraint upon them. Crudely summarized, our comparison shows that Pollitt's leadership more than Thälmann's was anchored in a class identity rather than faction, and that this was of some political significance. In the laxer environment of the popular front, it made for a greater independence of judgement than the Stalinization model has traditionally accommodated. But, at the same time, almost by definition, this was not expressed in the factional terms of an alternative political platform.

Authenticities of class

Bolshevization was from the start expounded in primarily political terms of overcoming factionalism and heterodoxy through the acceptance of binding party discipline. At the same time, political qualities were explicitly linked to a process of proletarianization, from the workplace basis of party organization to the class struggle credentials required of responsible party leaders. What class signified was seemingly unambiguous. The Bolsheviks, like other socialists, had long used class in a normative sense to convey distinct moral and political attributes. Bolshevization now meant the narrowing of these qualities to the 'party' attributes of firmness, loyalty and discipline. Individualism, vacillation, opportunism and adventurism, on the other hand, were all condemned as representing an alien class outlook. Already in 1920, in the provision made for purges in the Comintern's original conditions of admission, their target was defined in precisely such terms: of 'petty-bourgeois elements' worming their way into the workers' party.¹⁵ Such phrases may have been used indiscriminately,

but this did not mean that they lacked any practical application. Both party cohesion and its wider projection were seen as requiring strong, authentic proletarian leadership figures.

Thälmann and Pollitt both fitted the bill. Like many communist parties, the KPD was initially dominated by intellectuals like Paul Levi, whose defiant stance in 1921 seemed to confirm the unreliability of such figures.¹⁶ The Fischer–Maslow group, with whom Thälmann first entered the party leadership, was hardly more dependable, and it was therefore as the embodiment of the KPD's 'healthy, proletarian elements' that Thälmann emerged as party chairman.¹⁷ A dockworker, veteran of the pre-war socialist movement and 'hero' of the so-called 'Hamburg Rising' of 1923, Thälmann, in Zinoviev's words, was 'the gold of the [German] working class'.¹⁸ Unlike the younger Lenin School generation, whose class credentials were carefully vetted before admission to the school, he was also one of the more experienced figures whose advancement Stalin described as vital for Bolshevization and in the contest with social democracy.¹⁹ Proletarian in manner, speech and dress, his party loyalty was conflated with an almost existential sense of class to produce a visceral identification with Stalinism that nothing would ultimately sway. Thälmann never showed any interest in a personal platform or in the theoretical or programmatic distinctions on which one might have been based. Thorez, Gottwald and Browder – at least for the time being – were all of the same type; and so too in Britain was the boilermaker Pollitt.

To some degree, this represented a process of homogenization. Nevertheless, the rudimentary communist categories of class, sometimes borrowed by the movement's historians, concealed numerous distinctions of potentially formative significance, here including those of generation, political culture and work experience. Stalin himself stressed that the proletariat was 'not a sharply circumscribed class', but lay exposed on one side to proletarianized petty-bourgeois elements and, on the other, to the bribery and corruption of its upper strata by capitalism. Again, Stalin identified these alien elements with political problems such as factionalism, disorganization and the disruption of the party from within.²⁰ The Comintern's preoccupation with class purity was less intense than within the Soviet Union itself.²¹ Exceptionally, a figure like the Italian Togliatti could survive even at the head of his party. Nevertheless, student reports from the Lenin School reveal a similar concern to root out the ideological residues of the stigmatized 'labour aristocracy' or 'petty bourgeois'.²² The standard signifier 'working class' on party questionnaires thus concealed complexities that

could make for distinct approaches to leadership, involving resources and liabilities that would have been easier to manage had they been more easily extricable from each other.

Thälmann, more so perhaps than Pollitt, had liabilities to conceal. According to the cult constructed around him after 1924, he had grown up in a model proletarian household. Central to the narrative was his father, an innkeeper and small trader styled 'Comrade Jan', who as a member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) had bravely convened illegal party meetings at the time of the Bismarckian anti-socialist laws.²³ Already the conventions of a sort of 'master narrative' of the communist leader's life were being established.²⁴ Thälmann, however, had a very different story to tell when he came to produce a private autobiographical sketch during his imprisonment by the Nazis. Here his family life and schooling were described as 'in no way socialist', but if anything the reverse, while his father was a member, not of the SPD, but of 'all sorts of bourgeois and military associations'.²⁵ Thälmann's adherence to the socialist movement was thus described in the same manuscript as an epiphany: emerging from a socialist rally with literature clutched in his hand and anthems still ringing in his head, he sensed a 'new, vehement life' beginning.²⁶ Conversion narratives like this have figured prominently in communist autobiographies.²⁷ However, in the public lives of party leaders, whose deep proletarian roots had to convey the authenticity of the party itself, they were possibly less common and less serviceable.²⁸

Thälmann's mother was scarcely acknowledged at all. This too was characteristic. If class was a common denominator, it was in a distinctly gendered construction in which both Thälmann and Pollitt embodied the tough, masculine, fighting qualities of the heavy industrial worker. Communist autobiographies like those of Thorez and the American W. Z. Foster hence depicted only shadowy female figures and projected a proletarian pedigree through the masculine virtues of a father figure.²⁹ This was consistent with the depreciation of domestic ties implicit in the communist ambition of relentless, preferably factory-based activism. It was also consistent with Thälmann's persona as communist *Führer* and 'strongman'; and, doubtless, the authoritarian family structures of the Kaiserreich period can be traced in the pushing aside of mother and sister in favour of a combative, masculine conception of his class.³⁰ Thälmann's emergence as head of the paramilitary Red Front Fighters' League (*Roter Frontkämpferbund*; RFB) reinforced these associations with the immediacy of mass spectacle, as

during its massive set-piece demonstrations of the 1920s he took the clenched-fist salute of thousands of uniformed militants marching in military formation.³¹

In his autobiography, published in 1940, Pollitt confessed to never having liked salutes and slogans, and more specifically not the clenched-fist salute and Red Front slogan that originated with Thälmann's KPD.³² The significance of such details should not be overlooked. Growing up in a Lancashire textile district, Pollitt was a genuine cradle socialist who from an early stage deployed his early induction into the labour movement as a core component of his political persona. More distinctively, the primary political influence he acknowledged was that of his mother. Integrated into the world of paid employment, women in the textile districts were more than usually active both socially and politically; and, from the buxom factory women who daubed his sexual organs with oil and cotton waste to its opening portrait of his mother as model and counsellor, Pollitt's autobiography presented a curiously feminized presentation of his class credentials. Even his father, a blacksmith's striker, embodied a relaxed and hedonistic sense of masculine camaraderie centred on the pub. Class could thus also be constructed in more inclusive terms, politicized as an instinct for 'unity' and potentially softening the friend/foe dichotomy so characteristic of German communism. Certainly, Pollitt in his autobiography betrayed a surprisingly attenuated sense of anathema, whether in respect of class or political enemies.³³ On its very first page, he invoked the local policeman's wife as a source of support to his family, thus transmuting into an image of working-class community what by Stalinist convention was a compromising and even dangerous connection.

Contrasting work experiences underlined the multivalency of class. Leaving school in 1900, Thälmann worked for two years in the family business as a drayman, repeatedly feuding with his father over pay. He then took up casual work in the Hamburg docks and over the next two decades was employed variously as a warehouseman, longshoreman, deckhand, furniture remover and brewery driver. Like Thorez's, this was an unskilled, unstable and precarious existence; and like Thorez's it was transmuted retrospectively into a more settled occupational identity, in Thälmann's case as dockworker.³⁴ Significantly, Thälmann's adherence to the SPD, in May 1903, pre-dated by almost a year his enrolment in the appropriate trade union.³⁵ Thälmann later attributed this to a theoretical bent and streak of idealism prevailing over the materialist motivations of the trade unionist. He also claimed to have turned down

employment as a union official out of commitment to the interests of rank-and-file workers.³⁶

The critique of bureaucracy was common to militants of this generation, and Pollitt also gave it forthright expression. However, where Thälmann, according to Ruth Fischer, represented a 'substratum of ... unskilled or semi-skilled workers' at a disadvantage with party politicians, Pollitt's rhetoric of independence was rooted in the values of the skilled worker.³⁷ As a time-served boilermaker, he belonged to one of Britain's oldest and most exclusive crafts, the epitome of the labour aristocracy so misprized in communist circles. Pollitt himself, in the 'class against class' period, was to come under fire for his 'legalistic' approach to union affairs; but his whole political charisma was bound up with this sense of identity. Where Thälmann at rallies would rip off his collar in symbolic symbiosis with the outcasts of society, Pollitt dressed and comported himself like the time-served craftsman that he was, and insisted on the respectable credentials of a clean collar and tie.³⁸ To a critic like George Hardy, a warm admirer of the KPD, Pollitt's dismissal of appeals to 'street-corner loungers' was only the most overt expression of this pervasive influence of the labour aristocracy within British communism.³⁹

With what at first sight was the shared generational landmark of the First World War (1914–18), different work experiences once more gave rise to very different work situations. Thälmann, being liable for the call-up, steadfastly carried out what he saw as his duty as an artilleryman on the western front, where he was wounded four times and 'received the Iron Cross, the insignia of wounded soldiers and the Hanseatic Cross'. In the autobiographical manuscript he produced during his imprisonment, he proudly noted that he was never long in garrison 'because I was not a malingerer, a scaredy cat [*Angsthase*] and coward'.⁴⁰ Such attitudes could have no part in the public Thälmann myth, in which nothing was said to indicate that Thälmann had not always made his stand against chauvinism and social patriotism. Nevertheless, Thälmann's frontline experiences may help explain his matchless rapport with the RFB, whose relish for real and symbolic confrontation had its roots in the same wartime mentality.

Radicalized only in defeat, Thälmann was therefore not among those taking the 'direct path' to communism through the Spartacist League. Although he was in Hamburg during the November Revolution, he took no part in the workers' and soldiers' council movement. Instead, he joined the locally dominant Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*;

USPD), which on its foundation in April 1917 was conceived as a return to the values of pre-war social democracy. It was only as the USPD increasingly split over the issue of revolution that Thälmann allied himself to its powerful left-wing faction and began to make his mark on the Hamburg city parliament and as chairman of his local party group. As a delegate to the USPD's Halle congress of October 1920, he was consequently among those who took the 'second', indirect route to communism through fusion with the Spartacists. In the summer of 1921, Thälmann made his first visit to Moscow as a delegate to the Comintern's third world congress, representing what was now the first mass communist party outside of Russia.

Pollitt, who was one of the British congress delegates, had also arrived at communism somewhat obliquely, though without Thälmann's hesitations. An opponent of the war from the outset, he was exempt from conscription as a skilled metalworker and fought instead a shop stewards' war against deskilling and the militarization of labour. This was typical of the profoundly civilian formation of most of the CPGB's founding cohort, whose defining collective memory of the 'war in the workshops' was immortalized in books like Pollitt's *Serving My Time* and William Gallacher's *Revolt on the Clyde* (1936). It was thus as an industrial militant that Pollitt was drawn into communist politics, initially through Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF). Centred in East London, where Pollitt worked in the shipyards, the WSF had its origins in the women's suffragette movement and again provided Pollitt with the distinctive experience of speaking from otherwise all-women platforms for a body that some dismissed as a women's party. Detached from the 'unity negotiations' from which the CPGB emerged in mid-1920, Pollitt was to describe in his autobiography how for some time he continued to be regarded 'more as a militant trade unionist than as a Communist'.⁴¹

Though Thälmann was the elder of the two, and like Pollitt a long-standing socialist, any notion of generation as mere classification by birth date is here confounded. Thälmann's value to the Comintern was that he combined the quality of 'experience' which Stalin valued with an experience of Bolshevism that was hardly less formative than that of the Leninist generation proper. Pollitt's turn to communism, on the other hand, represented a less clear-cut break, and there was considerable continuity between his activities before and after becoming a communist. Though biography in theory was at the heart of the leadership cult, a life history like Pollitt's provided a source of personal capital that pre-dated Stalinization and was irreducible to its central tenets.

It is little wonder that the production of such narratives was viewed so warily, even in Stalin's own case, or that a party like the Parti communiste français failed to produce any such account apart from Thorez's ghost-written exercise in 'anti-individualism', *Fils du peuple* (1937).⁴²

Factionalism and dictatorship

Factionalism was a major theme in Weber's account of Stalinization. Distinct political groupings with competing programmes played a critical role within the KPD, as previously within the SPD, and faction was the obvious basis of advancement within the German party. Thälmann's own rise to prominence came through his association with the revolutionary 'left opposition' centred on his local party organization in Wasserkante (Hamburg) and on the Fischer–Maslow group in Berlin. His relations with this essentially intellectual grouping may perhaps be compared with the pro-Bolshevik 'nucleus' within the CPGB, in which Pollitt similarly provided a proletarian figurehead for a younger group of intellectuals working from the Labour Research Department. Already as a result of their October 1922 'Report on Organization', Pollitt and his closest collaborator R. Palme Dutt had secured minority representation on the party executive. The Fischer–Maslow group, including Thälmann, obtained a similar representation the following May on the basis of a compromise forged in Moscow to prevent the KPD fragmenting along factional lines during the crisis year of 1923.⁴³

In Germany, the grouping's subsequent rise and fall was to leave Thälmann alone in place as the plausible agent of Bolshevization as a form of proletarianization. In Britain, on the other hand, the CPGB already had a working-class leadership that showed little interest in competing political platforms or Comintern controversies. In due course, the Comintern functionary Manuilsky was to deride its easy-going ways as those of a society of great friends.⁴⁴ For the time being, however, as the Comintern sought to eradicate destabilizing influences, the CPGB's unflappable loyalism was a quality more highly valued. Instead, it was the earnest young conspirators around Pollitt and Dutt who threatened factional division on continental lines – though even they operated semi-clandestinely. Resistance to any wholesale renewal of the party leadership meant that Pollitt therefore had to bide his time until the Comintern itself decided to engineer such a change as a means of enforcing 'class against class'. By the time

that his leadership was properly established, any possible factional basis or rationale for it had long since disappeared.

The contrast with the intensely factional character of Thälmann's leadership meant that the role of a personalized leadership cult was also rather different. One of the classic functions of charismatic leadership is to provide an integration figure, whether in societies or in parties which are deeply fractured or unsettled. Another is to provide a sort of mobilization figure, whether to rally support to a regime or system of government, or as a personalized focus for competitive party politics. Any communist leadership cult combined elements of both. Nevertheless, Thälmann more than Pollitt was an integration figure, promising at once the transcendence and domination of faction. Pollitt, conversely, was more the mobilization figure, whose major contribution to British communism was not so much cohesion as political credibility.

Even critics conceded Thälmann's rapport with communist supporters, and with his unmistakable proletarian charisma. Annette Leo concludes that workers saw him as one of their own.⁴⁵ Already in the 1925 presidential election, his candidacy provided the focus for communist propaganda, as *Die Rote Fahne* depicted him with hammer in hand, a proletarian giant leading the 'red front' against its ill-assorted adversaries.⁴⁶ In this sense too, Thälmann can be regarded as a proletarian 'integration figure', loyal to the party, steadfast in the struggle, and combative towards the party's enemies.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, where Pollitt's standing in labour movement circles was higher than his party's, Thälmann's presidential polls in 1925 and 1932 compared unfavourably with Reichstag election results, and for non-communist workers he was a divisive figure and symbol of the doggedly pro-Moscow 'party communists'.⁴⁸ In due course, competition with the Nazis was to reinforce the tendency to depict him as a rival communist *Führer*. Nevertheless, the initial significance of Thälmann's leadership was as the instrument of factional dictatorship within the party.

Integration in this sense relied on both 'iron proletarian discipline' as a form of integration by exclusion, and the projection of unified leadership as a focus for this discipline. Recent research confirms that purges, as enjoined by the Comintern, had been a feature of German party life from the outset.⁴⁹ What distinguished the Stalinization process over which Thälmann presided was their systematic character.⁵⁰ In two main waves of purges between 1925 and 1929, twelve groupings or factions were expelled from the party, with devastating implications for its activist base.⁵¹ Thälmann himself invoked Stalin's example in the battle against opportunists and conciliators, and after the second

wave of purges continued to expound the need to purge the party of the 'enemy within'.⁵² This was the model which Manuilsky two months later commended to the CPGB: 'The German comrades carefully weigh every word spoken by anybody. They allow no deviation from the line, they attack the least deviation, respecting no persons.'⁵³ In Britain, however, the main disciplinary headache was not factionalist 'deviation' but maintaining the political direction of communists working in broader movements. In any case, an exiguous membership left little scope for purges on the German model. Annie Kriegel once observed that a scarcity of activists could necessitate handling those that did exist with 'kid gloves'; and, of all parties, the early CPGB had perhaps the greatest such scarcity relative to expectations.⁵⁴ Whatever the explanation, purges were not even mentioned in the seminal Pollitt-Dutt 'Report on Organisation'. Moreover, Bolshevization itself was interpreted in the sense of a mass party avoiding unnecessarily onerous conditions of membership and the over-zealous removal of defaulting members.⁵⁵

For Thälmann, factional dictatorship and the symbolic representation of strong leadership went hand in hand. Already in the mid-1920s, many features of the subsequent *Führerkult* were beginning to be attributed to him. With the failure to remove him in 1928, his position became unassailable – at least from below. An account of the twelfth party congress in 1929 describes him entering the hushed congress hall 'in the Stalin manner'; flanked and followed by a retinue of subordinates, he seemed a 'king among his subjects'.⁵⁶ According to the official congress protocol, his appearance on the platform was greeted with a 'tumultuous ovation' as delegates rose to sing the *Internationale* and the youth section called out 'Hail Moscow'.⁵⁷ Anything lacking in charisma was made up for by a sense of theatre. When Thälmann addressed a rally, proceedings would be opened by drum rolls and slogans shouted into megaphones, followed by marching columns of workers, the unemployed and party auxiliary groups. Thälmann himself would then be carried in by the 'strong fists' of the Mass Self-Defence squadrons that had replaced the RFB after it was banned in 1929. 'Again and again', ran the report of a 1932 rally, 'there was burning applause, the enthused shouts, the greetings for Ernst Thälmann as an expression not only of enthusiasm, but of the proletarian love of the masses for their revolutionary Führer.' Ripping off his tie, Thälmann would speak, even shout, in his native Hamburg dialect, in a staged routine aiming at a direct emotional connection with the audience. At once a leader in his own right and the personification of collective communist virtues,

his air of proletarian authenticity was unmatched by any possible rival.⁵⁸ Even within the party hierarchy, the myth began to be confused with reality.⁵⁹

If Thälmann too internalized the myth, there is no sign that it engendered a greater sense of his own authority in relation to Moscow. His possession only of a severely compromised biography may explain why this early leadership cult in Europe's most prestigious communist party was held to pose no serious threat to Moscow's central control. The impact of the Wittorf affair, when even zealous Stalinists expressed doubts about Thälmann, had been to publicly underline his dependency on Moscow's patronage. Even Thälmann's own party district had opposed his reinstatement. At the same time, the factional basis of his leadership remained a source of vulnerability. Unlike Stalin and his later epigones, Thälmann was not the KPD's general secretary: his position neither stemmed from, nor resulted in, control of the apparatus, but represented an adaptation of the public projections of leadership associated with the Lenin cult. Behind this façade, power struggles within the leadership persisted in the three-man secretariat on which Thälmann sat with Heinz Neumann and Hermann Remmele. At central committee discussions during 1932, Thälmann often found himself isolated, and Neumann even trespassed on his public prerogatives in contriving a shift from personality to party in that year's presidential election campaign.⁶⁰ Following disappointing results in Berlin and Hamburg, Thälmann was made to admit to the party's shortcomings in print: a sign again of the double-edged character of an instrument like self-criticism, which could be used to undermine intermediate leadership figures. That Thälmann survived, while Neumann and Remmele were removed from the leadership, was possibly less recognition of his indispensability than of his client status. A disjuncture thus remained between the public and private faces of leadership, and Moscow's authority upheld increasingly behind the scenes by the Lenin School trained *apparatchik* Walter Ulbricht.⁶¹ Though Ulbricht could never have rivalled Thälmann's popular appeal, he did underline its largely ceremonial character. No evidence has yet been traced of any significant dissension between Thälmann and Moscow, or even of his seeking to exercise meaningful discretion in his own party's affairs.

Biographical resources and personal capital

Bolshevization, as previously noted, required the narrowing down of class to the 'iron proletarian discipline' by which class values

became conflated with the party as political agent. Class, however, was freighted with other associations, often contradictory ones, and its use as a tool of authentication always contained the possibility of its own subversion. Even within the Bolshevik tradition – for example, in the Workers' Opposition of 1919–21 – it provided a rhetoric and scale of judgement that could be set against the logic of party hierarchy or 'bureaucracy'. Beyond it, 'syndicalism' provided one possible foundation for such attitudes; and the communist bugbear of 'labour aristocracy' another, perhaps still more dangerous because it was embedded in the rival institutions of reformism. When Stalin in a German context extolled the 'struggle of the non-organized workers' against the constraints of the unions, this did not therefore represent a belated enthusiasm for spontaneity.⁶² What Stalin distrusted in the 'organized' worker – organized, that is, under non-communist auspices – were accretions of loyalty, custom and association beyond the party's control. The ultra-sectarianism of 'class against class' was the most extreme manifestation of this distrust. Nevertheless, the attempted construction of class in terms that excluded its core institutions, as 'class against class' did in the west, was inherently unstable. When Stalin within the Soviet Union subsequently retreated from 'divisive proletarian values' to concepts of the nation, state or people, this did not by the mid-1930s imply any relaxation of party control; rather the opposite. On the other hand, the extension of the rhetoric of unity and legitimation to institutions not yet under communist control, as in the west, had rather different implications. 'Class against class' was a little like 'war communism' in its fantasy of a *tabula rasa* on which a revolutionary party or society could be established. The popular front, like the NEP, on the other hand, was akin to a concession to the intractability of older values and motive forces.

Biography was one of the main fields through which such tensions were alternatively managed or articulated. Like many historians, Sheila Fitzpatrick stresses the importance of the 'then' and 'now' in Soviet constructions of the self. However, if this could mean 'tearing off the mask' by the exposure of past liabilities, biography could also provide a source of moral or political capital that was not reducible to the 'mask' of model party member. In this respect, Pollitt's delayed advancement to the party leadership gave him extensive experience of negotiating these tensions even within a party context. As NMM secretary until 1929, he was centrally concerned with maintaining links and networks with the non-communist left. Until disqualified in 1928, he was also a Boilermakers' delegate to annual conferences of the Labour Party and

Trades Union Congress. In the Comintern press, he upheld the conventions of the 'English Movement' in 'conducting its politics in a "gentlemanly" way'; on assisting in the Reichstag elections in December 1924, it was for its neglect of union issues and 'merciless' ridicule of social democrats that he criticized the KPD.⁶³ Associations of this type could not but cut across the notion of the party as 'total institution', excluding other influences.⁶⁴ In 1929, the SPD's London correspondent Egon Wertheimer expressed astonishment at the warmth with which Labour delegates received communist speakers whose arguments they rejected. Pollitt in particular, according to the 'renegade' communist Ellen Wilkinson, received fulsome tribute 'to his personality and the genuine liking and respect which he has won from all sections of the Labour movement'. Wertheimer himself proved so susceptible to this 'non-committal affection' as to describe him as 'tower[ing] head and shoulders above the average trade union leader'.⁶⁵

A naïve view is that such biographical details did not matter, as earlier instincts and associations were simply 'replaced' by Stalinist ones. Certainly, Pollitt was a confirmed party functionary, well integrated into Comintern structures, by the time that he began to be projected as the CPGB's 'outstanding leader' in the mid-1930s. Ironically, it was therefore only after Thälmann's imprisonment that he began to assume a similar public profile to his. It was in 1934, for example, that Dutt urged Pollitt to assume the 'full Thaelmann position as the visible leader of the widest powerful mass opposition movement against Mosley, Fascism and War'. This, Dutt explained, demanded 'real living LEADERSHIP ... and in reality that means YOU'.⁶⁶ Already in 1932, the CPGB's customary printed congress report had been replaced by Pollitt's address as secretary. By 1935, this carried the personalized title *Harry Pollitt Speaks*.

Pollitt did not, however, speak only with the Comintern's voice. Instead, his well-known rejection of Moscow's anti-war line in September–October 1939 represented the culmination of a series of disillusionments over the previous two years. One was the arrest as spies in 1937 of his close friends Rose Cohen and Max Petrovsky, over whom Pollitt is said to have made strong private representations.⁶⁷ He also reacted strongly to Manuisky's criticisms of the CPGB at the Soviet party congress of March 1939, and two months later proposed vacating his position over the Comintern's imposition of a virtual *volte-face* over British conscription. What was striking in such exchanges was how Pollitt sought to throw into the balance his own personal leadership resources. As he pointedly reminded his central

committee colleagues at the start of the war: 'I was in this movement practically before you were born, and will be ... a long time after some of you are forgotten.'⁶⁸

Possible factors contributing to such a stance can only be touched on here. Class was one. Until 1927, Pollitt had continued intermittently to work at his trade so as to be eligible for official union responsibilities, and this remained important as a psychological resource. When Thorez in 1939 made an even greater adjustment to the new Comintern line, his biographer notes by way of explanation that the only life now available to him was that of a Comintern functionary.⁶⁹ This was not quite true of Pollitt, and the fact that he did in 1941 briefly return to the shipyards was to provide a crucial part of the Pollitt myth. 'One thing I *do* know', his mother wrote to him on this occasion, 'I would not lose my dignity, by having an office boy's job, & being dictated to, by someone not half so competent, because the tools are still vaselined.' Prominently advertised in Pollitt's autobiography, these sentiments provided both a psychological resource and a source of political judgement counteracting the political contortions of Comintern loyalists. 'I was 23, had never heard of Bolshevism', he recalled of the outbreak of the First World War in the central committee debates regarding the second one:

Had never heard of the Basle resolution, but had a class instinct which was sound and ... got as many physical beatings up for ... endeavouring to get that war transferred into a civil war as any person in this country. Has got the same class instinct ... now, and say that whether it is the Second Imperialist war or the Third one, if ... there is a chance for the smashing of fascism ... that alone is justification for the line we are putting forward.⁷⁰

Given these outspoken sentiments, explicitly directed against the 'disappearance of internationalism' from Moscow's own pronouncements, it is interesting that this did not put an end to Pollitt's leadership career. As late as 1934, he had complained of pressures to have him removed from the leadership, and seems to have been especially distrustful of returning Lenin School students.⁷¹ Nevertheless, there was no real factional basis to such divisions, and the instability of Moscow's own positions meant that Comintern loyalism alone could hardly provide one. By 1937, soundings regarding Pollitt's replacement at the time of Cohen's and Petrovsky's arrests are said to have met with the resistance of his colleagues. There was nobody who could take on

his public functions; and during his demotion from 1939 to 1941, nobody did.

Two other considerations may be linked with this. The first was that Pollitt's functions of mobilization and legitimation, more so perhaps than those of integration, were consistent with their performance by a variety of leadership figures.⁷² Already before 1939, the election of William Gallacher as sole communist MP provided an obvious such figure, who quickly provided one of the earliest of the Comintern's exemplary autobiographies. Other such figures, also depicted biographically, included the veteran Tom Mann and the unemployed workers' leader Wal Hannington. Pollitt's role of mobilization figure meant that he enjoyed significant authority beyond the party, which the CPGB in 1939 could ill afford to alienate. At the same time, the more collective performance of such functions meant that he could continue to make a significant, perhaps unequalled, contribution in this regard, even while deprived of the general secretaryship. Hence, of course, the paradox that Pollitt wrote and published his own exemplary party life at the very moment of his demotion.

A final factor would bear more systematic examination. This is the extent to which Pollitt's role as general secretary eventually provided him with leverage over appointments and communications which Thälmann as chairman had lacked. Already as secretary of the NMM, he had been accused of running a 'one-man show' in which he decided appointments and destroyed official correspondence without circulating it.⁷³ His suppression ten years later of a Comintern telegram regarding the character of the war was to play a significant part in the discussions that ensued, and it is clear that Pollitt had become acclimatized to the more relaxed day-to-day oversight of the CPGB's affairs. With no Comintern representative permanently stationed in Britain, nor even by 1938 attending the national party congress, Pollitt also began to exercise appreciable powers of patronage. Beneficiaries included the central committee appointee William Cowe, who had returned in virtual disgrace from the Lenin School for his strong 'traces of labour aristocracy'; the Fleet Street journalist William Forrest, whom Pollitt offered the editorship of the *Daily Worker*; and the future party secretary John Gollan, whom Pollitt by the late 1930s was grooming as secretary of the Young Communist League. With the additional role that he played in the generation of party finance, Pollitt's functions were evidently not quite the same as those assumed by Thälmann in the course of Stalinization.⁷⁴

For rather complex reasons, Pollitt's independent resources as party leader were in some respects significantly greater than Thälmann's, and

the day-to-day constraints on him somewhat weaker. In one sense, this merely confirms the validity of the Stalinization thesis for the party and period for which it was developed. At a somewhat platitudinous level, it also confirms that, even despite such variations, no communist leader remained a communist leader except by accepting the ultimate authority of the Comintern. At the same time, personal political capital, in this case anchored in class identities, the weakness or otherwise of factional rivalries, and the degree of control over patronage and communications, all meant that significant variations were nevertheless possible within this broader framework. Ironically, it was precisely because Pollitt's relationship with his party was in many respects closer to Stalin's than was Thälmann's that he had greater scope to establish a less dependent style of leadership. Internationally, more perhaps than in Russia itself, the creation of 'little Stalins' was not just the uncomplicated exercise in discipline through emulation that it at first appears.

Notes

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- 2 As, for example, in M. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin* (London: Merlin, 1980 edition), pp. 433–7. For the Stalinist cults, see F. Borkenau, *World Communism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 394; M. Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organisation and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen, 1954 edition), pp. 177–84.
- 3 According to Andreas Dorpalen's extensive survey of East German historiography, before 1930, 'the terms applied to Ernst Thälmann were adopted from Nazi nomenclature rather than from Stalin's "personality cult"'. See A. Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988), p. 371 and n. 122.
- 4 M. Lazar, *Le Communisme: une passion française* (Paris: Perrin, 2005), p. 117.
- 5 On these questions, see K. Morgan, G. Cohen and A. Flinn, *Communists and British Society, 1920–91* (London: Rivers Oram, 2007), ch. 4.
- 6 R. G. Suny, 'Stalin and his Stalinism: Power and Authority in the Soviet Union, 1930–53', in I. Kershaw and M. Lewin (eds.), *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 26–7; D. Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization: Ideas, Power and Terror in Interwar Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 51, 291.
- 7 E. A. Rees, 'Leader Cults: Varieties, Preconditions and Functions', in B. Apor et al. (eds.), *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern bloc* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 18–19.

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- 9 R. Levine-Meyer, *Inside German Communism: Memoirs of Party Life in the Weimar Republic* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), p. 154.
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- 11 N. LaPorte, *The German Communist Party in Saxony, 1924–33* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 239–45.
- 12 See, for example, C. Penetier and B. Pudal, 'Stalinisme, culte ouvrier et culte des dirigeants', in M. Dreyfus et al., *Le Siècle des communismes* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2000), pp. 369–76; M. Perrot, 'Les vies ouvrières', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 edition).
- 13 D. Brandenberger, 'Stalin as Symbol: A Case Study of the Personality Cult and its Construction', in S. Davies and J. Harris (eds.), *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 249–70.
- 14 K. Morgan, *Labour Legends and Moscow Gold: Bolshevism and the British Left* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006), pp. 228–9.
- 15 Reproduced in K. McDermott and J. Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 226–8.
- 16 See Jean-François Fayet, this volume, chapter 6.
- 17 Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO), 'Protokol der Sitzung der Polsekretäre und Redakteure', 1 September 1925, I 2/2/6, Bl. 5ff.
- 18 Weber, *Thälmann-Skandal*, pp. 16–17.
- 19 Stalin, 'The Prospects of the Communist Party of Germany and the Question of Bolshevization' (February 1925), in J. V. Stalin, *Works: Volume 7* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), p. 37.
- 20 J. V. Stalin, 'Foundations of Leninism' (April 1924), in *Leninism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928 edition), p. 173.
- 21 See S. Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), chs 2–4.
- 22 See the British student reports dated 27 May 1935 in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), 495/100/993.
- 23 For a valuable summary of many aspects of the image of Thälmann promoted by the KPD leadership, see P. Maslowski, *Thälmann* (Leipzig: Kittner, 1931). On the East German construct of Thälmann's youth and Thälmann's own autobiographical writings, see R. Scheer, "'Ich bin kein weltflüchtiger Zigeuner": Legende und Wirklichkeit einer Jugend – über die frühen Prägungen Ernst Thälmanns', in P. Monteath (ed.), *Ernst Thälmann. Mensch und Mythos* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).
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- 32 H. Pollitt, *Serving My Time* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1941 edition), p. 50.
- 33 For a fuller discussion, see K. Morgan, 'Harry Pollitt, Maurice Thorez and the Writing of Exemplary Communist Lives', in J. Gottlieb and R. Toye (eds.), *Making Reputations: Power, Persuasion and the Individual in British Politics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 56–69.
- 34 For Thorez's identity as a coalminer, see S. Sirot, *Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2000), ch. 6.
- 35 Scheer, 'Legende und Wirklichkeit', p. 49; H. Weber, 'Das schwankende Thälmann-Bild', in Monteath (ed.), *Ernst Thälmann*, p. 8.
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- 37 R. Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 146.
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- 40 Thälmann, 'Gekürzter Lebenslauf', Bl. 27–28.
- 41 Pollitt, *Serving My Time*, p. 126.
- 42 See Brandenberger, 'Stalin as Symbol', pp. 249–70.
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8

Stalinization and the Communist Party of Italy

Aldo Agosti

Any comparative study of Communist Party of Italy (*Partito Comunista d'Italia*; PCD'I)¹ history must take into account the party's particular circumstances. At the time of its foundation, the PCD'I was – to a greater extent than most other European communist parties – rooted in its own society, and enjoyed reasonably wide and expanding grass-roots support. Appropriate comparison can, therefore, be made only with parties that originated from majority secession from an established social democratic organization, such as the French, German, Czech and, possibly, Norwegian parties. Such parties were not only legal, but also had a solid organizational base, a significant presence in parliament, a considerable influence in 'parallel' mass organizations and their own press and campaigning offices.

Yet, whereas the PCD'I was practically the last party to form during the Communist International's (Comintern) strategic 'period' of 'imminent revolution' (1917–21), it was also the first to make the Comintern face the dramatically anachronistic character of its hypothesis. Despite itself, the PCD'I thus became the exemplification of the contradiction which dominated the early years of international communist party development and consolidation. In other words, the contradiction between instruments conceived and created to lead a revolution instead being forced to operate in situations which were no longer revolutionary, or even reactionary.

Less than two years after its foundation, following the March on Rome and the accession of the Fascist Party to power in October 1922, the PCD'I was already working in conditions of precarious semi-legality. Its militants were hounded and arrested; its press was proscribed. By 1926, once the short-lived period of political instability that seemingly opened up new opportunities for the democratic and workers'

movements had come to an end (it only survived for the last half of 1924), a blanket of fascist dictatorship descended over Italy and remained for the next 17 years. From there on, the PCD'I sunk into clandestinity and continued its battle in exile. Thus, a comparative study of the PCD'I must consider communist parties which were in the same situation, for instance the Hungarian party, or, from 1934, the Austrian party.² Similarly, analysis of the PCD'I's Bolshevization and, later, its Stalinization must take into account this time discrepancy. Hence, when discussing the PCD'I, Hermann Weber's analytical categories are useful only in part and should be employed with caution.

Roots, components and framework

The PCD'I was founded in Livorno on 21 January 1921.³ Though its foundation was belated, the PCD'I passed through a process of genesis and maturation that was no shorter, or less complex, than most other communist parties. The First World War had radically modified both the structure and fabric of Italian society: a new working class had emerged, shaped in the militarized factories, with a different organic composition, younger and more impatient than that which had gone through the great trade union struggles of the Giolitti period. In the countryside, too, the war had deeply eroded previously established social relations. Above all, this occurred in the share-cropping areas of central Italy, where widespread strikes and agricultural agitation took place after the war, but also in some parts of southern Italy, where the movement to occupy the land developed very swiftly, and in those parts of the Po plain where day labourers were employed on the farms. This massive social mobilization immediately had repercussions for the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*; PSI), which was simultaneously protagonist and beneficiary of the great collective experiences of conflict. In 1920, it had almost four times as many members as in 1914, and the geographical and social make-up of the party was thereby changed; this put its organizational structures under pressure and revealed their inadequacies. The PSI was still essentially a propaganda organization. It had no direct links with the masses, which it was able to reach only through trade federations and local trade union councils; its sections were essentially regional or provincial cultural circles interested in political agitation, with no common political line to connect them. Thus, a growing gulf between programmes and their possible application soon reflected an intensifying crisis in the relationship between the political leadership and the wider mass movement.

The various components that eventually comprised the PCD'I were formed against this background, through a troubled and differentiated aggregation process.⁴ The first to move decisively towards a split from the PSI was the 'abstentionist' group, led by Amadeo Bordiga (born 1889), an engineer from Naples who could count on a national network of support, but with the bulk of his forces recruited in Piedmont and Campania. Bordiga's first recruits had been among the well-connected Neapolitan dockworkers, railworkers, postal, telegraph and telephone workers, and published a newspaper, *Il Soviet*, to voice their point of view. Thus, at the Bologna congress (October 1919), the 'abstentionist' group appeared as an organized current within the party, presenting a motion against participating in elections. Ideologically, its strength stemmed from a coherent but rather simplified interpretation of Marxism, hinging on the overthrow of the bourgeois state and on the party as the only instrument and guide of the proletarian revolution.

Another fundamental component of the future PCD'I was focused on the review *L'Ordine Nuovo*, edited by Antonio Gramsci, Angelo Tasca, Palmiro Togliatti and Umberto Terracini, and was less organized in character. This review was published in Italy's most industrialized city, Turin, where the factory councils' movement became widespread after the war. The *Ordine Nuovo* group was firmly convinced of the need to overcome and reform the traditional structure of the trade unions and the party through the instrument of workers' self-government. For this reason, they paid great attention to the new ways in which the 'avant-garde' working class was organizing itself. At first, such prospective reform was not seen as incompatible with continued PSI membership and the intention of renewing the party from within. Following the political defeat of the occupation of the factories in September 1920, however, the *Ordine Nuovo* group felt a split was inevitable. By this time, moreover, their influence was considerable but hard to quantify outside the Piedmont region; they certainly had considerable cultural influence, especially on specialized and educated urban working-class cadres.⁵

Most of the 59,000 militants who voted for the communist motion at Livorno came from the ranks of the 'maximalists', the revolutionary left wing of the PSI. Some of them were cadres (public administrators, trade unionists, parliamentarians) who had gained considerable experience in the PSI. Others, perhaps more numerous, came from the later generation of recruits who joined the PSI in 1920. 'Almost a second new party', Andreina De Clementi has written, 'a heritage of collective

energy, impatience and enthusiasm, but weakened by a poor level of political socialization'.⁶ These militants flocked to the PCD'I in great numbers and, especially in regions like Emilia and Tuscany, their contribution consisted of the 'old' maximalist traditions enlivened by the social tensions of the immediate post-war period. This tradition was predominantly urban, artisan and plebeian rather than working class, often tinged with syndicalism, anarchism and generally 'subversive' tendencies, which were far from being insignificant.

Another important contribution to the formation of the PCD'I came from the Young Socialist Federation, almost all of whose members (47,000 out of 53,000) gathered under the banner of the new party, supplying it with a sizeable nucleus of lower and mid-level cadres. This was another reason why the creation of the PCD'I took the form of a division between generations: youth was the common factor among the first communist militants, among both leaders and the rank-and-file.

Finally, the contribution of an intellectual group (journalists, school teachers, students and very young graduates and undergraduates) radicalized by the war and uncompromisingly critical of 'bourgeois democratic' values was evident from the outset and affected the PCD'I more than any other party. Indeed, intellectuals made up more than half of the party's first central committee. Incidentally, this feature would in part survive both the Bolshevization campaign of 1924–25 and the turn to the left in 1928–29: as late as 1931, at least three of the six members of the political bureau could be labelled intellectuals.

Not surprisingly, blending this complex structure of political cultures and social components into a Bolshevik-like party, as the Comintern intended, proved to be a difficult task. The Livorno congress took place in a political period dominated by the rapidly spreading Fascist action squads, and as the social struggles that had shaken Italy in the two preceding years began to subside, a period of crisis began for all the proletarian organizations, without exception. The PCD'I, too, was hard hit, losing about 30 per cent of those who had entered its ranks following the split with the PSI. Nevertheless, the party managed to put down roots throughout Italy. Obviously, the distribution of the members was still very uneven: almost 90 per cent of members were concentrated in seven of the eighteen regions of Italy. In certain northern and central regions (Piedmont, Venezia-Giulia, Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany), there was a relatively strong rank-and-file, whereas in the southern areas and in the islands (Sicily and Sardinia) membership was very much weaker. This geographical distribution was similar to that of the

PSI, and reflected the party's fundamentally provincial structure. As such, the PCD'I was a party with roots deeply embedded in the Italian society of the time, but indicative of its scarce penetration into the large cities except, perhaps, Turin.⁷

From Bordiga to Gramsci: a peculiar Bolshevization

The general election of May 1921 put the new party's strength to the test. The results were not encouraging: whereas the PSI retained solid support, obtaining almost 1,600,000 votes and 122 seats, the PCD'I did not reach 300,000 votes and gained only 15 seats. This was a clear demonstration that the party had not obtained the same percentage of the proletarian electorate as it had gained members from the split in the local PSI branches and had been unable to extend its influence beyond the traditional strongholds of socialist support.

Even so, the PCD'I vote was at least an expression of a compact and resolute revolutionary minority. With his rigid and doctrinaire ideology, Bordiga – who had been appointed party secretary at Livorno – was in fact well adapted to the intransigent spirit of a party that had grown up in blunt contrast with tradition. The PCD'I boasted that discipline and efficient organization were its distinctive features, unlike the PSI, which was torn by the struggle between its different tendencies. The PCD'I saw the PSI as the biggest obstacle to the victory of the revolution in Italy, and considered fascism to be nothing more than a coherent manifestation of bourgeois reaction. Naturally, then, it encountered serious difficulties in applying the directives of the Comintern, which made the conquest of a majority of the working class the premise for revolutionary action. Although the PCD'I declared its adherence to the discipline of the Comintern, it did not in fact make any serious attempt to apply the tactics of the 'united front' in Italy.⁸

Such incongruity became even more serious when, after a further socialist split in October 1922, just as fascism rose to power, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) brought up the question of reunion with the PSI. Only a small 'right-wing' minority led by Angelo Tasca and Antonio Graziadei was in favour of this project and, in early 1923, the party leadership resigned amid controversy just before the government began their severe repression of the PCD'I. This was a difficult moment for the new party: with many of its leaders in gaol and with dramatic organizational problems, it had to defend its line against a Comintern that apparently intended to push the policy of fusion via reliance on Tasca's minority group.⁹

In the event, it was Gramsci who first realized that the situation was no longer tenable. He was aware that the party could only survive if it remained loyal to the Comintern, and began to try to build up a new leadership better able to head off the 'right wing', but also capable of necessarily keeping its distance from Bordiga. Within a few months, Gramsci was able to bring some important leaders over to his position, many of whom had an *Ordino Nuovo* background; these included Terracini, Togliatti, Alfonso Leonetti and Mauro Scoccimarro. This 'centre' group was still a long way from obtaining a majority consensus in the party central committee, while the active rank-and-file stubbornly adhered to a 'party patriotism' that rejected any reunion with the socialists. Nevertheless, the centre group's influence was evident in the more flexible policies adopted by the PCD'I on the eve of the 1924 general elections. Having proposed a coalition with two socialist parties without result, the PCD'I stood as one list with the 'Third Internationalists' of the PSI (*Terzinternazionalisti*, known also as *Terzini*).¹⁰

The result of the election was quite encouraging for the communists: compared with the collapse of the two socialist parties; 260,000 votes and 19 seats in parliament could be seen as a success. A significant contribution to this success came from the *Terzini*, who soon joined the PCD'I; votes were gained in those constituencies where their candidates stood for election. On the other hand, communist votes were now distributed more uniformly throughout Italy, having fallen slightly in the northern regions (though moderated by the success of the 'Proletarian Unity' list in the big industrial cities) and increased in areas such as Campania, Umbria and Sicily.

Immediately after the election, Giacomo Matteotti, a reformist socialist member of parliament, was murdered by a Fascist squad. This gave rise to a crisis of fascism, as its pretension to being a constitutional party now looked hardly credible, and seemingly opened up an opportunity for the PCD'I to seize the political initiative. This it did with more flexibility and a better sense of manoeuvre than in the past. Although results in terms of collaboration with other components of the anti-fascist opposition were meagre, the PCD'I's organizational success was remarkable: membership had dropped below 9,000 in 1923, but numbers increased throughout 1924 to reach 18,000 (thanks also to the contribution of the *Terzini*) and up to 25,000 in 1925. Crucially, too, the social composition of the membership, the organization, the political strategy – the very character of the party – underwent a profound transformation in this period. The application of the Comintern's directives on Bolshevization narrowed the scope for free

political discussion and forged a conspicuous apparatus, which became the very backbone of the party. Simultaneously, however, it was grafted onto the renewal process begun under Gramsci's leadership and translated into a form that strengthened and extended the party's roots in society – in contrast to developments in countries such as France. An emphasis on territory, the local branch, was replaced by an emphasis on production, the factory (or street) cell. The cell was less exposed than the branch to police repression and more suitable to prepare for underground organization. This in turn was fairly easy to reconcile with the *Ordine Nuovo* tradition and helped reform the composition of the party: there was a relative increase in the number of workers based in large factories in the Italian cities, an increase in membership in Sicily and Sardinia, and an influx of agricultural workers (in particular labourers and share-croppers) in Emilia and Tuscany.

Surprising as it may seem, then, Bolshevization did not turn the PCD'I into a more working-class party. At the same time, because of the specific nature of the Italian situation, it produced a very important phenomenon: the aggregation around the party of forces of different political origins (anarchists and republicans as well as, naturally, socialists and, in some rare cases, Catholics). This was due to the PCD'I's being recognized as the most combative and organized adversary of fascism. Moreover, as new members joined the party (mainly new recruits, although some militants returned after the severe repression of 1923), a serious blow was struck against Bordiga's influence. He had continued to question the party line and to criticize Comintern policies, and even the shift to the left at the fifth world congress – which seemed to mirror some of Bordiga's positions – did not question the trust that had grown up between the ECCI and the PCD'I leadership under Gramsci. The constitution of a left faction only sharpened the tones of the internal struggle within the PCD'I, fought with no holds barred and using administrative methods barely within the statutes. On the eve of the PCD'I's third congress, held in Lyons (January 1926) to ensure the delegates' safety, over 90 per cent of the members sided with Gramsci and Togliatti, ensuring that their resolution was carried, though with explicit reservation.¹¹

The Lyons congress sealed the final marginalization of the left within the PCD'I. Tension between Bordiga and the Comintern peaked at the sixth ECCI plenum in February–March 1926, at which the former gave possibly the last truly oppositional speech to be heard in an assembly of the Comintern. Even then, however, the idea of Bordiga's return to the fold was not completely discarded. Initially, his appointment to the

international apparatus was proffered, but was eventually abandoned in response to PCD'I reluctance rather than Moscow opposition.¹²

By then, the Bolshevization of the PCD'I was complete. However, it can hardly be argued that such a process resulted in an impoverishment of the party's political analysis as happened in other instances (most clearly in Germany and France). On the contrary, the analyses on the class structure of Italian society and the nature of fascism in the political theses approved by congress and presented by Gramsci and Togliatti were remarkable. Such theses supplanted the abstract theorizing of the party as an instrument for revolution, putting in its place a rich but subtle analysis of the circumstances in which the party operated, of the relationships between the various social classes, of their political expression and of the contradictions which existed in the fabric of society. The 'driving forces of the Italian revolution' were seen as being, on the one hand, the working class and the agricultural proletariat, and, on the other, the peasants in southern Italy. The party's job was to organize, unify and mobilize these forces through a series of partial struggles, to bring them to insurrection and to install the proletarian dictatorship.

Without doubt, this was a remarkable theoretical construction, made up of historical understanding and social and strategic analysis unusual in the tradition of the Italian labour movement.¹³ In this sense, it can be said that while the party fulfilled the task of its organizational Bolshevization (though with some peculiar and atypical features), the intellectual element in the PCD'I leadership provided a sort of cerebral resource to withstand ideological Bolshevization, or at least to contain it in limits that were stricter than the ones experienced by the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) or the French Communist Party (*Parti communiste français*; PCF). Nevertheless, the analysis drafted in the Lyons Theses did not correspond to eventual reality. The PCD'I's increased support within the wider workers' movement, which related to the dramatic fall in the political and organizational importance of the PSI, led the PCD'I's leadership (and, even more, its apparatus) to predict the rapid fall of fascism and underestimate the growing weakness of the anti-fascist front and its isolation in Italian society.¹⁴ Against the PCD'I's estimation, therefore, 1926 was characterized by the progressive and evermore rapid transformation of fascism into open dictatorship, wherein systematic and legalized state repression complemented the actions of the Fascist squads. As a result, the PCD'I was forced into semi-clandestinity and, again, its membership fell sharply.

Equally, however, such developments created a situation that would leave a lasting mark on Italian history. The disappearance of any semblance of democracy was in fact endowing the PCD'I, in spite of itself, with the sort of legitimacy it had never previously held, making it not so much the anti-system party *par excellence*, but instead the most determined and militant of the forces opposing the dictatorship. Since all the most vital groups of the opposition alliance acknowledged that only revolution could topple fascism, the contribution of any revolutionary force was recognized and the PCD'I gained a legitimacy that no other communist party would acquire until much later. The fascist dictatorship period in Italy represented a watershed that the French left never experienced and for the Germans came too late.¹⁵

Yet, the PCD'I did not regard itself as the fulcrum of a national anti-fascist opposition, but rather as an international army patrol called to carry out its duty in a situation of relative capitalist stability, embodied in Italy by the fascist dictatorship. This was also the view of the Comintern, which studied the party closely. After all, the PCD'I was the first party called to reckon with a new political phenomenon (fascism), of which the Comintern understood its importance at the European level, if in contradictory ways. Although relations between the PCD'I and the Comintern were not as tense as in 1922–23, the 'Italian question' continued to puzzle Moscow. There had been serious dissent between the ECCI and the PCD'I concerning the tactics to be adopted after the assassination of Matteotti and, in particular, over communist dissociation from the boycott of parliament begun by other anti-fascist parties. Later, in October 1926, Gramsci was seriously worried about the internal struggle within the Soviet party hierarchy, and warned its leaders of the risk of losing their function as a reference point for the world proletariat by exhausting themselves in a power struggle. Togliatti, who was the PCD'I delegate at the ECCI in Moscow, made a more realistic evaluation of the inevitability of that conflict; he had no doubts about the need for the Italian party to side with the majority in the Soviet politburo.¹⁶ But the episode left a shadow of diffidence towards Italian communists.

An unwilling Stalinization, 1926–29

Such controversy, which took on harsh tones, was still echoing when the axe of the 'exceptional decrees' came down on the PCD'I in November 1926. Many important leaders, including Gramsci, were arrested (Togliatti escaped arrest because he was in Moscow), commu-

nist organizations were disbanded, its press closed and thousands of militants were denounced in a special Tribunal for the Defence of the State. For Italian communists, a long period of underground activity was underway.

For some months, the PCD'I was able to carry out feverish propaganda activity, particularly through the circulation of large numbers of newspapers and leaflets. This intense organizational effort helped the PCD'I emerge as the most vibrant expression of the struggle against fascism at a time when the other opposition parties had practically disappeared from the Italian scene, and reduced to groups of political exiles. But it was an effort which could not be kept up for long. In May 1927, communists in Italy still numbered 10,000, including party members and members of the Youth Federation, most of whom were in the north; by the second half of that year, thousands of cadres had been imprisoned or interned. The so-called 'internal centre', which was constituted like a network, was patiently reconstituted after each arrest but, in the end, was reduced to just a handful of militants.¹⁷

Clandestinity contributed considerably to the forging of PCD'I identity. The Leninist 'model party', which had originated in the struggle against the Tsar's repressive machinery, viewed illegal practice not only as a necessary field of action, but also a fundamental means of political education for the cadres. The political culture, the mental attitude and structure of clandestinity, or at least of carrying out clandestine work alongside legal work, had become – not without effort – the genetic inheritance of every communist party. However, since the mid-1920s, the training for clandestine work had increasingly lost its complementary role to the insurrectionary objective.¹⁸ Rather, it had become, especially for the persecuted and weaker parties, a daily routine which enabled them to survive, but also generated an over-development of the organizational machine and internal vigilance that stifled political debate. Clandestinity brought with it the risk of fascist police infiltration, exacerbated suspicions and encouraged sectarianism. These tendencies spread easily in an environment already prepared to see the political opponent as an enemy, especially after the defeat of the Russian oppositions.

The PCD'I was among the first Comintern sections to experience this kind of situation, which was only partially offset by the existence of a substantial membership among the mass of emigrant workers, especially in France, Belgium and Switzerland. These workers, who had emigrated for economic and political reasons, had remained an important element of strength for the PCD'I. A large percentage were highly

skilled workers forced to leave the country because of employers' discrimination or fascist (or police) persecution. 'This rank-and-file of workers', wrote Giorgio Amendola, 'offered, with unending generosity, money, hospitality, accommodation and, above all, militants ready to be called by the party to return to Italy legally, or even illegally, according to the need'.¹⁹

From the very beginning, the PCD'I had cared for its militants north of the Alps. In September 1921, the *Fédération communiste des sections italiennes en France* was set up and its branches acted independently of the French party. Following the Comintern's fourth world congress, however, the *Fédération* was disbanded and its members brought into the PCF. From then on, Italian militants became members of the PCF, briefly maintaining some of their identity via the *Groupes communistes de langue italienne*, before the Bolshevization of the PCF led to the *Groupes* being disbanded. This decision met with the approval of a new PCD'I leadership keen to regain control over the 'language groups', especially in Paris, where the influence of Bordighism was still evident. Hence, many Italian militants perceived dissolution to be a tactical manoeuvre aimed at silencing the opposition to the left of the party. According to a police report, 3,000 of the 7,000 Italian communists left the party as a result. The following year, the PCF allowed the 'language groups' to re-form, only for the increasingly serious rifts within the Russian party to impact on its 'sibling' parties and the battle against Bordighism became entwined with the battle against Trotskyism. As such, the two-year period 1927–28 was one of the most difficult for the Italian communist émigrés in France. The expulsion of comrades suspected of 'heresy', ordered by both the Italian and French parties, added to a state of confusion, apathy among the militants, rejection of dual membership to the PCD'I and PCF, tension between the leaderships of the two parties, and mutual temptation to monopolize the 'mixed' organizations in which French and Italian militants converged.²⁰

In such circumstances, links to the Comintern played an increasingly decisive role for both the underground forces active in Italy and for those Italian communists in exile. The sense of belonging to a 'world party' was a factor of moral cohesion and an expression of trust in the future that helped them through a very difficult time. In addition, the technical equipment and the financial subsidy provided by the Comintern proved indispensable for the very survival of the party. Meanwhile, the long-term political disagreement between the Comintern and the PCD'I seemed at last to be resolved. The Lyons congress

had laid down a line that emphasized the 'popular' character of the Italian revolution, and did not rule out the party's fighting for intermediate democratic ends. Such a line was further clarified by the group around Togliatti, although it did meet with some opposition from the left of the party, mainly from the Youth Federation (Luigi Longo, Pietro Secchia). Generally, however, the PCD'I concurred with the more flexible attitude held by the Comintern under Bukharin's leadership, with Togliatti and Tasca both establishing a particularly close relationship with Bukharin.

Things changed at the beginning of 1929, when the clash between Bukharin and Stalin in the Soviet politburo was transferred to the ECCI, and Tasca (the PCD'I representative on the ECCI) sided openly with Bukharin. Tasca was recalled to Paris and his position severely criticized by the PCD'I, though the Comintern did not feel this was enough. At the ECCI's tenth plenum, all the Italian leaders were indicted for failing to expel Tasca; a failure that was linked to the policy followed by the PCD'I after the Lyons congress, which was now accused of opportunism. Togliatti and Grieco defended themselves with dignity at the plenum, but the party was disciplined under the new Comintern directives. In September 1929, Tasca was expelled and, shortly afterwards, Togliatti emphatically embraced the extreme interpretation of the 'third period'. He claimed that in Italy 'the elements of an acute revolutionary crisis were maturing', and extended the theory of 'social fascism' to Italian social democracy and *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Freedom), a radical movement active in the country. Togliatti also rejected the hypothesis of an intermediate democratic phase between the fall of fascism and the proletarian revolution.²¹

Evidently, the Stalinization of the PCD'I was proceeding apace. In December 1929, foreseeing an accentuated radicalization of the Italian situation, Longo presented plans to reorganize the PCD'I. These aimed to bring back to Italy both the focus of the PCD'I's political work and the 'seat of organization and direction'. Not surprisingly, such proposals brought a new crisis to the PCD'I leadership, with Leonetti, Pietro Tresso and Paolo Ravazzoli opposing it and attacking Togliatti for accepting. Shortly afterwards, they were expelled for having made contact with the international Trotskyist opposition,²² and the same thing happened to Ignazio Silone in July 1931.²³ From gaol, Terracini and Gramsci expressed their disagreement with the way in which the party dealt with its 'opponents', and criticized a political line they felt was abstract and held no prospect for progress.²⁴

'Class against class' and the 'turn' of 1930

If we were to assess 'the turn' (*la svolta*), as the new line was called, on the basis of the political directives to which it was conforming, that is in tandem with the resolutions of the tenth plenum, then we could recognize the complete Stalinization of the PCD'I. In some respects this is true. The party's official decisions between 1929 and 1933 followed all the paradigms of the third period and the tactics of 'class against class'. Up to that point, the PCD'I had been – in a 'Leninist' sense, at least – a democratic party, and internal debate had flourished. From 1929, however, such characteristics were drastically curtailed. The new trend in the party stifled the capacity for political analysis of the Italian situation, internal dissent was regarded as equivalent to betrayal, and derogatory remarks about other anti-fascist organizations reached unequalled peaks of vulgarity. There were even episodes of physical violence perpetrated against political opponents. Nevertheless, it would be very reductionist to look at things only from such a perspective. The *svolta* of 1930 was in some ways an important moment in the 'refounding' of Italian communism, which cannot be explained only by reference to directives from Moscow, but must also be understood in its primary location within the social and cultural milieu.

Recent historical studies in Italy, following in the footsteps of German historical approaches to resistance to Nazism, have looked in more detail at the features of a popular, widespread anti-fascism. In towns, the very fabric of class itself – made worse by a serious economic situation, rising unemployment, wage cuts and the growing exploitation of factory workers – provided the source of social discontent and fertile ground for the spreading of an inherently 'political' resistance to fascisization. In the countryside, the brutal destruction and repression of the trade unions and opportunities for social emancipation connected with 'the socialist universe' (from the *case del popolo* and co-operatives to 'red' local councils) revived, during the two fascist decades, radical rebellious traditions and an 'autonomous culture' of the popular classes. For instance, 'subversive' funerals – a phenomenon mainly recorded in villages and small to medium-sized towns in Tuscany, Emilia Romagna and southern Lombardy, where memorable battles by the sharecroppers and farm labourers had taken place before and after the war – overlapped private motives of friendship and inter-family solidarity with a public display of loyalty to class traditions and a readiness to challenge repression by the authorities.

Clearly, the inclination for and the commitment to clandestine activities involved only a small circle of militants. At the same time, the PCD'I's call to insurrection and its instructions to generate open class clashes with the regime made little headway within the industrial proletariat, and bore only limited relation to dissent in the countryside. Yet organized political anti-fascism, which but for rare instances concurred with communist anti-fascism and popular anti-fascism, did bring about moments of contact and interaction.²⁵ The *svolta* party somehow found a place within this situation.

In effect, beyond the 'thin and uniform veneer of ideology'²⁶ that concealed a variety of different circumstances, it was a pattern of collective behaviour, especially at the level of the proletarian rank-and-file, which nourished a change in communist activity. The influence and fascination of the 'international situation' and the process of 'building socialism' in the Soviet Union (even when expressed in mythical terms) proved integral elements in the militants' political and cultural make-up. The presence of a communist nucleus within the Italian population thus succeeded in affirming itself in a continuous fashion, notwithstanding the fact that relations between the rank-and-file and the party leadership became evermore precarious. Besides the different geographical distribution of support, and notwithstanding a high degree of fluctuation,²⁷ the relative stability of communist membership is striking. Thus, the party numbered about 7,000 in 1932; more or less what it had been at the end of 1927. Following the *svolta*, 5,000 new members joined in only a year-and-a-half. The culture of clandestinity itself enabled recruitment in socially and generationally homogeneous areas; or, in other words, in regions where social dissent and popular anti-fascism were more widespread. The activity of the party cells in Italy reflected this reality, while the language of 'the turn' was geared less towards theoretical issues and more towards operational and organizational concerns. As such, the 'turn' marked the emergence of different viewpoints and ways of thinking among different generations and members of different backgrounds, along with the affirmation of a type of communist cadre no longer tied to the climate which surrounded the split with the PSI, but rather to that of day-to-day resistance against fascism.

That said, the *svolta* did not provide the desired results: the two rallying cries of a general strike and an armed struggle were met with indifference on the part of the masses. Hundreds of cadres fell into the hands of the fascist police and ended up either in gaol or interned,

thereby creating a real 'parallel' party that, despite its sectarianism, kept alive a force for cultural and political change and a rigid sense of discipline that would to bear fruit later.

Having proved relatively successful in terms of proselytism, the *svolta* underwent a serious crisis amidst the final transformation of fascism into a reactionary mass regime. Again, the PCD'I's relationship with the Comintern became tense, although this time disagreement focused more on the application, rather than the theoretical justification, of the party line. Having criticized the Italian party and put pressure on it to make an about-turn in its politics in 1929, the Comintern intervened in 1930 to put a brake on the party's 'left turn'. The most frequent accusation made against the PCD'I was that of 'Carbonarism'; that is, the tendency to conspiratorial sectarianism and estrangement from the problems of the masses. But the party only had to go a fraction too far in correcting such a defect – for instance, seconding a trade union's demand without adding the right political watchwords – for the leadership to be accused of 'yielding opportunistically' and 'economistic deviation'.²⁸

From popular front to war: a party under surveillance

The Comintern's policy change of 1934 came at a time when the PCD'I's clandestine activity in Italy was in great difficulty. Relations with the rank-and-file organizations were at an all-time low. There were still many communist militants (or groups of militants), but they were isolated and forced into passivity. There were no links between them, or with the party centre abroad. The attempt to form 'internal centres' had by now been abandoned. The almost obsessive policy of the PCD'I had become to breach the fascist masses by deepening the contradictions between the regime's demagogic statements and the endemic poverty and exploitation among a considerable section of the Italian population, taking advantage of every legal avenue to undermine from within the support on which fascism relied.²⁹

It was not always easy to reconcile such an approach with the Comintern's cautious attempts to create broad alliances against the aggressive politics of international fascism from 1933 to 1934. The search for a comprehensive political line that could respond to both the expectations of a united anti-fascist movement in exile and the discontent (often over-estimated) growing in the fascist ranks occupied the PCD'I in the following years with not always felicitous tactical manoeuvring. Initially, having been criticized by the Comintern for its limited progress, the

PCD'I maintained a prudent approach for the first months of 1934, more or less keeping its old sectarian position. But the leadership in exile, with Ruggiero Grieco as head of the political bureau once Togliatti travelled to Moscow in July 1934, could not help but be deeply influenced by the evolving situation in France. The pact for common action between the PCF and the French socialists was followed a few weeks later by a similar pact between Italian communists and socialists, signed by Luigi Longo and Pietro Nenni. This marked a renewed dialogue and collaboration between the two parties after a long period of hostility, and enabled better relations between the forces of anti-fascist emigration, which were radicalizing their positions.

The hope that Mussolini's regime would experience a crisis was crushed by the fascist victory in Ethiopia and the declaration of the Empire. Once again, the likelihood of a long struggle presented itself in all its harshness. Hence, for a short time, the PCD'I again sought to gain access to the regime's mass organizations, to establish a link with the workers' and young people's everyday lives, and to address Italians in a language made familiar by the fascists' social propaganda. Even so, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War swung the pendulum in the opposite direction, making the united anti-fascist front a priority.

The Italian communists made a very important contribution to the Republican cause in terms of both numbers and organizational capacity. Over 3,000 volunteers enrolled in the International Brigades. Some of the most experienced Italian cadres took part in the war: Togliatti himself acted as ECCI representative to the Spanish politburo and was an influential adviser to the republican government, while Longo and Di Vittorio played important military roles. The vast majority of volunteers came from exile, and most were no longer young. Having emigrated after the advent of fascism and the last desperate battles against the fascist squads, they had been tempered through hard experiences of struggle and were keen to take up arms against the enemy that had defeated them. For the PCD'I, the Spanish Civil War was not only a very important source of cadres who were later to put their experience of political and military leadership to good use; it was also the starting point for a re-evaluation of strategy. In a very well-known article published in November 1936, 'Sulle particolarità della rivoluzione spagnola', Togliatti described and developed the effort Dimitrov had made over those months to characterize the popular front as a transitional phase to socialism. This phase would be different from the 'Bolshevik model' and independent from it. Togliatti indicated that the objective of the Spanish communists was 'a new type of democracy', in which

the working class would have hegemony over all other anti-fascist groups. The foundation of this new democracy would mean the destruction of the political and social roots of fascism through a radical purge and democratization of the state machinery and the 'disciplining of the entire economic life of the country'.³⁰

This objective, initially set for Spain, also became the aim of the anti-fascist struggle in Italy as designated by a new pact of united action signed by PCD'I and PSI on 26 July 1937. Briefly, this seemed to be the first step to a wider political agreement among the forces of the anti-fascist opposition abroad, and actually brought some benefit to those within the country. In fact, after the Spanish Civil War broke out, Italy witnessed the revival of solidarity and popular involvement with international anti-fascism, and the first signs of disintegration at the regime's grass roots.³¹

The legal activity pursued to penetrate the workers' trade unions achieved very modest results, but it did succeed in accommodating a considerable degree of anti-fascist dissent among students and intellectuals. These groups did not usually belong to any party organization. Disillusioned with the 'social' and 'anti-capitalistic' messages of the regime, they came closer to communism by following their own path and via theories other than Marxism, especially within the artistic and literary vanguard.³² They were members of a new generation, which would have an important role in the reconstitution of the PCD'I following the defeat of fascism.

Despite this, the bitter disagreements within the republican front in Spain – as well as the reckless struggle carried out by communists against their political opponents, who were simplistically labelled 'the fifth column' of fascism – sowed seeds of mistrust among the exiled anti-fascist movement. Indeed, these would not be entirely overcome even when it became clear to see – as in Carlo Rosselli's later writings, for example – the pivotal role they were playing in the struggle against fascism and for democracy. The threatening shadow of Stalin's repressive grip on the USSR had already begun to lengthen over the PCD'I, opening a new phase of its 'Stalinization'. The party accepted the verdicts of the sensational public trials against ex-Bolshevik leaders without reserve, and Togliatti – as a member of the ECCI secretariat – excelled himself with an implacable denouncement of the 'crimes of the Trotskyist bandits'.³³

Within the Comintern, Togliatti's departure for Spain meant that his place on the ECCI was taken by trusted but less politically experienced comrades. In general, the PCD'I was viewed by Moscow with a mixture

of arrogance and suspicion: arrogance, because the results of its attempts to undermine the fascist regime from within looked very modest; suspicion, because an emigrant clandestine party appeared especially permeable to the attacks of *agents provocateurs*. As such, the onset of the terror of 1937–38 had serious consequences for the PCD'I. Repression reduced considerably the number of PCD'I cadres at the intermediate level, especially among the most anonymous of its militants; that is, workers who had migrated to the USSR. By 1938, Moscow was accusing the PCD'I of poor vigilance and forced the disbandment of its central committee. The reasons for this appear contradictory, suggesting that there was a divergence of opinion among the Comintern leadership. However, the most prominent charge against the PCD'I was that it had not followed sufficiently the Russian party's line and had shown serious shortcomings in the fight against Trotskyism.³⁴

Simultaneously, there was a complete revision of the cadres and executive members of the PCD'I conducted in a heavy-handed inquisitorial fashion. The negative consequences were felt in several directions: independent political analysis was further curtailed, the PCD'I's relationship with other anti-fascist parties abroad was poisoned by new polemics and, above all, by its obsessive suspicion that anyone could be an *agent provocateur*. Consequently, the party failed to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the new clandestine groups in Italy, who often comprised young intellectuals coming from the 'rebellious' Fascist ranks. The outcome was the almost total paralysis of party activity in Italy.

Although the PCD'I never lost its connection with Italy, and the Italian exiles in France maintained a unity that, disagreements notwithstanding, had been able to survive longer than that of the French left, the party approached its ultimate challenge, the Second World War, in a position of great weakness. The Ribbentrop–Molotov pact of August 1939 was met with bewilderment and confusion among the Italian communists and had a negative effect on their already worsening relationship with other anti-fascist forces. The attempt by the PCD'I to reconcile the pact with a continuation of a united anti-fascist politics (which was copying the PCF position in the first weeks of war) was short-lived and soon gave way to a rigid alignment with the Comintern's resolution on the 'imperialist war'. The Italian communists in France were forced into a sudden and difficult clandestinity, which exacerbated the difficulties of a leadership already deeply confused.³⁵ Accordingly, on 10 August 1940, the ECCI Presidium hard-heartedly listed all the recent errors committed by the PCD'I: the party

had taken up its position on the war 'with enormous delay'; it had produced a manifesto containing serious political errors (the use of the expression 'Hitler's aggression against Poland' was considered one such); it had used language that was inappropriate to the situation in Italy ('transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war'); it had dropped all links with the country, for a long time neglecting the task of creating a clandestine organization; it had lowered the level of vigilance, adapting itself 'to the conditions of life in a democratic country like France'. All this, the resolution concluded, 'has caused the beginning of a process of decomposition of the leading group and, finally, its capitulation and failure before the practical tasks of the struggle against imperialist war'.

With this, the varying fortunes of the PCD'I in its relations with Moscow had reached perhaps their nadir, and few could have foreseen that in only five years a political group of exiles, with weak and tenuous links in the country, would become one of the strongest communist parties in the West.

Notes

- 1 The official denomination of the party was *Partito comunista d'Italia* (Communist Party of Italy), stressing that it was a section of the Communist International. It remained such until 1944, when it changed to *Partito comunista italiano* (Italian communist party), aiming to point out the national character of the party.
- 2 A comparison with the German communist party would, of course, be particularly interesting. The KPD enjoyed a far longer period of legal activity than the PCD'I. Nevertheless, even in the Soviet zone, it did not emerge after the Second World War with a force similar to that of the Italian party. This can be explained by the much harsher repression it suffered after 1933, and by the fact that the party missed the opportunity of taking part in a widespread national movement of resistance.
- 3 Among the few notable books in English detailing the pre-war history of the PCD'I are E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia* (London: Macmillan, 1953–78); idem, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930–35* (London: Macmillan, 1982); J. B. Urban, *Moscow and the Italian Communist Party: From Togliatti to Berlinguer* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1986). For relations with the other anti-fascist parties, see C. Delzell, *Mussolini's Enemies: The Italian Antifascist Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). A long list of studies in Italian may be found in A. Agosti, *Storia del PCI* (Rome: Laterza, 1999), pp. 127–30; A. Vittoria, *Storia del PCI 1921–1991* (Rome: Carocci 2006), pp. 165–84.
- 4 L. Cortesi, *Le origini del PCI. Studi e interventi sulla storia del comunismo in Italia* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1999).

- 5 G. A. Williams, *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Communism in Italy, 1911–21* (London: Pluto Press, 1975).
- 6 A. De Clementi, 'Radiografia del partito dopo la scissione di Livorno 1921–26', in M. Ilardi and A. Accornero (eds.), *Il Partito comunista italiano. Struttura e storia dell'organizzazione 1921–79* (Annali dell'Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 1981), p. 902.
- 7 R. Martinelli, *Il Partito comunista d'Italia 1921–26. Politica e organizzazione* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977).
- 8 This point has probably been undervalued by most studies on the PCD'I. Just as, in the Russian Bolshevik Party, the 'warfare approach' of the years 1918–20 survived the NEP and was reasserted during the 'revolution from above', the hostility for social democracy in the PCD'I's formative years may well account for its final compliance with the theory of 'social fascism' in 1929.
- 9 P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano Volume I: Da Bordiga a Gramsci* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967).
- 10 T. Detti, *Serrati e la formazione del Partito comunista italiano* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1971).
- 11 Spriano, *Da Bordiga*, pp. 273–313.
- 12 A. Agosti, 'The Comintern and the Italian Communist Party in Light of New Documents', in T. Rees and A. Thorpe (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 106.
- 13 E. Ragionieri, *Palmiro Togliatti. Per una biografia politica e intellettuale* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1976).
- 14 Martinelli, *Il Partito comunista*, p. 221.
- 15 A. Agosti, 'La famiglia politica comunista come rifiuto radicale della democrazia "borghese". I casi francese, tedesco e italiano negli anni Venti', in *Les Familles politiques en Europe occidentale au XXème siècle* (Ecole française de Rome, 2000), pp. 150–1.
- 16 C. Daniele and G. Vacca (eds.), *Gramsci a Roma, Togliatti a Mosca. Il carteggio del 1926* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999).
- 17 P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano, Volume II: Gli anni della clandestinità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), pp. 61–72.
- 18 J. Pacheco Pereira, *A Sombra. Estudio sobre a clandestinidade comunista* (Lisbon: Gradiva, 1993), pp. 21–41; F. Andreucci, *Falce e martello. Identità e linguaggi dei comunisti italiani fra stalinismo e guerra fredda* (Bologna: Bononia University Press 2005), pp. 33–5.
- 19 G. Amendola, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano, 1921–43* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978), p. 131.
- 20 L. Castellani, *L'émigration communiste italienne en France, 1921–28* (Rome: Editori Riuniti 1991).
- 21 A. Agosti, 'The Italian Communist Party and the Third Period', in M. Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).
- 22 E. Francescangeli, *L'incudine e il martello. Aspetti pubblici e privati del trockismo italiano tra antifascismo e antistalinismo, 1919–39* (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2005).

- 23 The case of Silone, who would later emerge as an appreciated writer and continue his political battle in the ranks of the Socialist Party, has been the centre of a lively discussion among Italian historians. There is evidence that, for many years until 1930, he had been in close contact with the Fascist political police, though it is difficult to assess to what extent the information he provided contributed to the disbanding of PCD'I organization. See D. Biocca and M. Canali, *L'informatore: Silone, i comunisti e la polizia* (Milan: Luni Editrice 2000); and, for a presumption of innocence, S. Soave, *Senza tradirsi, senza tradire. Silone e Tisca dal comunismo al socialismo cristiano, 1900–40* (Torino: Aragno, 2005).
- 24 P. Spriano, *Gramsci in carcere e il partito* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977); M. Giovana, 'Umberto Terracini e il dissenso con il partito', in A. Agosti (ed.), *La coerenza della ragione. Per una biografia politica di Umberto Terracini* (Rome: Carocci, 1998).
- 25 G. Santomassimo, *Antifascismo e dintorni* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2004), pp. 17–60; C. Natoli, 'L'antifascismo popolare in Italia', in L. Klinkhammer, C. Natoli and L. Rapone (eds.), *Dittature, opposizioni, resistenze* (Milan: Unicopli, 2005); A. Höbel, 'L'antifascismo operaio e popolare napoletano negli anni Trenta', in G. Chianese (ed.), *Fascismo e lavoro a Napoli* (Rome: Ediesse, 2006).
- 26 G. De Luna, *Donne in oggetto: L'antifascismo nella società italiana, 1922–39* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), p. 67.
- 27 Agosti, 'The Italian Communist Party', p. 100.
- 28 Agosti, 'The Comintern', p. 108.
- 29 Ragionieri, *Palmiro Togliatti*, pp. 544–6.
- 30 P. Togliatti, *Opere*, IV, 1 (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1979), pp. 139–54.
- 31 S. Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929–43* (Rome: Laterza, 1991), pp. 226–9.
- 32 E. Santarelli, *Storia del movimento e del regime fascista, Vol. II* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1967); S. Bertelli, *Il gruppo. La formazione del gruppo dirigente del PCD'I, 1936–48* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1980).
- 33 A. Agosti, *Togliatti. Un uomo di frontiera* (Turin: Utet, 2003), pp. 214–23.
- 34 E. Dundovich, *Tra esilio e castigo. Il Komintern, il PCD'I e la repressione degli antifascisti italiani in URSS, 1936–38* (Rome: Carocci, 1998).
- 35 Agosti, 'The Comintern', pp. 114–15.

9

The Spanish Civil War and the Routes of Stalinization

Gina Herrmann

Since the opening of the Soviet archives in Moscow, historians and cultural critics have reignited the flames of a long-burning debate about the role of the Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). The story of Spain's civil war is well known. However, for the purposes of the present chapter, it merits recalling three aspects of communist wartime protagonism. First, the Spanish Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de España*; PCE) enjoyed its period of greatest political strength during the war, when it became the most visible and consistent champion of popular front anti-fascism. Second, the Manichean terms in which the Spanish Civil War has been cast (i.e. 'democracy vs. fascism') stem not from communist representation in the Republican government (indeed, they held only 17 seats in parliament after the 1936 election), but from the wartime exigencies that drove the embattled Republic to request aid from the Soviet Union, the only major power willing to breach the Pact of Non-Intervention to support the legal government of Spain. The neutrality of the United States, combined with the very limited resources offered by the French, meant that non-intervention functioned as an arms embargo to the detriment of the Spanish government. While non-fascist Europe refused to succour the Republic, German and Italian aid, in blatant contravention of the pact, looked like an assurance of the Republic's imminent defeat.

Finally, although Cold War historians have focused on Spain as one of the most sinister examples of Soviet imperialist malfeasance, it must be recalled that at the outbreak of Spain's war, Soviet foreign policy was aimed at forming an alliance with the western powers against fascist Germany. The situation in Spain confused these efforts, for as the Spanish Republic lost control of its state apparatus, revolutionary

movements took hold resisting not only the Nationalists, but the Republic itself. The Soviets did not want to alienate France and Britain by appearing to support Bolshevik-style revolution in Spain. This, of course, followed from the establishment of the Communist International's (Comintern) popular front policy in 1935. On the other hand, if the Third Reich was engaged in Spain, less readily might Hitler turn his attention to the east and toward Soviet borders. From the Kremlin's vantage point, a Nationalist victory in Spain would have also left France – with hostile neighbours on three borders – unable to forge an anti-fascist alliance with the Soviets. In the early autumn of 1936, the efficacy of German and Italian intervention moved Stalin to break with non-intervention and begin to provide material and advisory support to the Republic.¹ It must be recalled that this aid came at the *request* of the Republican government which needed both weaponry and military and intelligence experts.² The fundamental point to grasp is that the image of a communist-controlled Republic wed to the Soviet Union simply cannot be maintained, for in August 1936, when the Republic sent Spain's gold reserves to the Soviet Union, the communists and socialists had yet to enjoy ministerial positions.

Soviet intervention also came in the form of the International Brigades, created in 1937 under the aegis of the Comintern. The Brigades consisted of an all-volunteer force of some 40,000 foreign men and women – many of whom were communists, but also including other leftists who joined the communist party in order to facilitate their enlistment – whose purpose in going to Spain was to resist fascism.³ It would be difficult to overestimate the massive psychological impact (in Spain and abroad) of the International Brigades and Soviet armament and personnel, which in turn became the communists' best tool for propaganda and recruitment.

Beginning in the summer of 1937, the Soviet Union began to scale back its participation in the Spanish war. Soviet foreign policy had turned towards China. At the same time, Soviet tanks and planes were no match for the technical superiority of German weaponry. The Republic's gold reserves were nearly exhausted by the middle of 1938. Still, the prolongation of the war into the early spring of 1939 can be attributed in part to a reputed \$60,000,000 credit offered by the Kremlin. By the middle of 1937, the delivery of Soviet aid was hampered by the Nationalist blockade of Mediterranean waters, and 'the conflict turned into a long war of attrition against the Republic which would last until late March 1939'.⁴

Spain and Stalinization

Archival research appears to have proved that Weber's theses on Stalinization appropriately describe the PCE. And yet the documents that support the view of a Stalinized Spanish communism are subject to the ideological location of the historians interpreting them. Scholars of Spanish–Soviet relations have had to recognize – in some cases with disappointment – that the process of Stalinization as it relates to Spain cannot be reduced to a single narrative arc. For in Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, Stalinization was a multifaceted project that, among other goals, shored up the popular front, involved setting up systems for ideological correction and organizational control of the PCE, aimed to eventually produce a Soviet-style revolution, sought to address the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Union, and proposed new models of civic, institutional and personal identity and thus 'Sovietize' Spanish communism. Nevertheless, the adoption of the term 'Stalinization' should give us pause, for underlying much historiography about Soviet-style communism in Spain can be found an unarticulated, partial conflation of 'Stalinization' and 'Comintern control'. In this chapter, I take the former to refer to a far-reaching and complex social, psychological, cultural, ideological and institutional series of *international* practices and collective encounters, while the latter describes the administrative relationship between the centralized body in Moscow and its Spanish section. Still, the tendency to such conflation stems from the real mutual influences and intersections of the institutional and social worlds of communism. While Comintern influence in Spain, especially during the Spanish Civil War, led to the PCE's Stalinization, I will argue that the *idea* of a revolutionary Russia and the material manifestation of Soviet aid to the Spanish wartime Republic created a deeply and broadly felt communist enthusiasm among Spanish Republicans that constitutes a process of Stalinization that extends beyond matters of the Spanish section's adherence to Comintern discipline and control. This kind of communist 'structure of feeling' merits rigorous study, and a social history of the PCE remains long overdue.⁵

Like the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) from which Weber elaborated his theses on Stalinization, the PCE holds a crucial and unique place in international communist history. Absolutely marginal on the Spanish political arena before the 1920s, the PCE became *the* focus of Comintern activity by the

mid-1930s, when the Spanish Civil War opened up the possibility of an anti-fascist/popular front route towards the establishment of a people's democracy in Western Europe. In general, the legacy of Soviet intervention in Spain's war has fed two fundamental and usually dichotomous premises. Within the pro-communist historical school and in much communist collective memory, Spain has represented the best example of the democratizing force of anti-fascist popular frontism. For anti-Stalinists and historians operating from a Cold War paradigm, Spain is seen as the most egregious example of Comintern control and sinister Soviet foreign policy. Emblematic of the latter are historians such as Burnett Bolloten (writing through the Cold War) and Ronald Radosh (in the twenty-first century), who maintain that despite the rhetoric of wartime unity and exemplary communist discipline espoused by the Stalinized PCE and their Comintern mentors in Spain, the Kremlin's objective remained the same: to found on the peninsula a Soviet satellite, the prototype of the post-1945 Central and Eastern European states.⁶ For the editors of the *Livre Noir*, Spain – and not Germany – stands out as the clearest illustration of this prototype of Stalinization, proof of which may be found in the political murders and iniquity associated with Comintern and Soviet state security activities in Spain. Françoise Furet likewise sees in Spain the kernel of what would later be cultivated as the 'people's democracies' extended throughout Europe via models of unity/front tactics that had been employed in Spain during the Civil War.⁷

This disparity of vision continues to be reflected in the historical literature about Soviet activity in Spain. Historians sympathetic to the communist position during the war, like Helen Graham, Paul Preston and Ángel Viñas (to name just three), have convincingly shifted scholarly attention to a Spanish Republic acting as its own agent in its relationship to the Soviet Union. From their research we see that the issues under debate no longer involve just Comintern control of Republican and PCE affairs – for it was, as all sides admit, thoroughgoing – but the broader foreign policy, social and cultural issues entailed in Soviet–Spanish diplomacy of the mid-1930s. This international relationship evolved as a series of coinciding interests at a moment when Spanish Republicans strove to implement benefits of European modernization from which their nation had long been excluded. As such, the Soviet presence in Spain created a unique wartime 'Stalinist' milieu among the rank-and-file that had little to do with the Comintern or its agents. For many, the Soviet Union shone as beacon of that long-desired programme of modernity.

In the following pages, I am primarily interested in examining two responses to Soviet intervention and activity during the Spanish Civil War, both of which bring nuance to the Stalinization narrative. The first is to see how the war communiqués of Palmiro Togliatti, the Italian Comintern adviser, address how Comintern efforts in Spain were thwarted by a highly fluid and disordered political situation within the Spanish Republican left. Rather than upholding the view that Comintern agents successfully controlled the Negrín government and the wartime PCE, Togliatti's reports demonstrate that his mandate to establish a successful popular front war strategy met with continual and ultimate frustration. The second aim is to look at Stalinization via an alternative route – from below – which reveals how militants in the base thought and felt about things Soviet: military aid to the embattled Republic, yes, but also the adoptability of what Furet called the communist 'illusion'.

From the archives

The first text to construct an archive-based narrative on the exchanges between Spain and the Comintern is *Queridos camaradas: La internacional comunista y España 1919–39* (1999) by the Spanish historian team Marta Bizcarrondo and Antonio Elorza, whose personal political sympathies have long rested with the communists.⁸ They conclude that from its birth to the end of the war in 1939, the PCE depended on Moscow for ideological and strategic direction, as well as for financial support. The authors' findings leave no doubt that behind the Spanish leadership (José Díaz and Dolores Ibárruri), the men running the show were Dmitri Manuilsky, Georgi Dimitrov, Stoian Mineev (Stepanov) and the Argentinean adviser on the ground in Spain, Vittorio Codovilla, who was eventually replaced in 1937 by the far more astute and competent Palmiro Togliatti. Elorza and Bizcarrondo offer the most complete narrative of the Comintern's absolutely central function in the birth and development of Spanish Stalinist communism, the basic contours of which are as follows.

The PCE, a minuscule group amounting to perhaps a few thousand members until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, was born from splinter groups within the Spanish socialism. The party grew not exclusively from proletarian fervour for a Russian-style revolution; rather, it was the product of a plan carried out by junior Soviet emissaries with little organizing experience sent to Spain in 1919. Mikhail Borodin (Mikhail Gruzenberg) and Jesús Ramírez (Charles Phillips, an American

Socialist) arrived in Madrid with a remit to brandish the banner of the Third International. These Comintern agents came at an opportune moment, when Spain had seen a steep increase in its syndicalist movements and political affiliation due to the economic growth resulting from Spain's neutrality in the First World War. The end of the decade also coincided with a period of great popular enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution, infusing the ranks of anarcho-syndicalists and socialists alike.

Two fledgling communist parties arose from fractures in the socialist party: the first, *el Partido Comunista Español*, the group formed on 15 April 1920 from a schism between the adult and youth ('*Juventudes*') divisions within the socialists, and the second, *Partido Comunista Obrero Español*, made up of leftists from the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*; PSOE) supportive of the Third International. The *Juventudes* rejected moves to fuse the two groups, but after June 1921 and the third Comintern congress, the parties were merged at the behest of the International. In late autumn 1921, the Comintern sent a Swiss agent, Jules Humbert-Droz, to negotiate between the two parties; by 14 November 1921, the definitive *Partido Comunista de España* came into being.

Internal tensions among the factions nonetheless remained. The PCE, with a membership of less than 1,000, operated clandestinely, or from exile in France, between 1923 and 1930 during the military dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera. Through the 1920s, breakaway communist splinter groups, formed in part in response to differing views on adherence to the Comintern, further decreased the PCE's relevance. The most important rival groups were headed by two keen theoretical minds (the PCE had notoriously poor intellectual leadership) from the communist left: Joaquín Maurín, who broke from within the PCE's Catalan group to create the Workers' and Peasants Bloc (*Bloc Obrer i Camperol*; BOC) in 1930, and Andreu Nin, who formed the Communist Left of Spain (*Izquierda Comunista de España*; ICE) two years later. These small parties would later merge to form the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*; POUM), famously persecuted by the communists and Soviet agents.

During the 'third period', the PCE suffered isolation. But even from within its sectarianism the party began to forge its identity in relation to and in distinction from the powerful revolutionary parties long active in Spain. The tides turned in the early 1930s when party membership grew rapidly to perhaps 10,000 in 1932, and although cultivated by Moscow, the Spanish leadership demonstrated some resistance

to Comintern directives by rejecting the call to push for proletarian revolution at the expense of the emerging democracy.⁹ Such disagreements ended with an assertion of the Comintern's power and will: in 1932, the PCE general secretary José Bullejos and his men, attempting to assert a degree of autonomy, were replaced by a group of new Spanish leaders trained at the Lenin School in Moscow and likely to conform to the Comintern line. To ensure the discipline it sought from the new PCE heads, José Díaz (general secretary) and including the future international communist 'superstar' Dolores Ibárruri (*la Pasionaria*), the Comintern summoned Codovilla. Known for his ferocious implementation of Moscow's orders, Codovilla served as the principal intermediary between the PCE and the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI). Between the fall of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the Asturian Revolution of 1934, the communists prospered under his supervision: the party gained a seat in the Spanish parliament and its membership continued to grow.¹⁰

With the outbreak of civil war, the PCE expanded rapidly, growing from perhaps as few as 1,000 members in 1929 to approximately 30,000 in 1936, and to over 300,000 at the height of the war in 1937. These figures may be augmented by as many as several hundred thousand fellow travellers or sympathizers if we include membership in the United Socialist Youth (*Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas*; JSU) and the huge Workers' General Union (*Unión General de Trabajadores*; UGT), about 50 per cent of whose membership roles were said to be communist.¹¹ Eventually the most powerful of the Republican parties, the PCE came to be regarded as the most disciplined, well organized and militarily effective of all the anti-fascist adversaries.

Spain Betrayed: the debate reinvigorated

The book that has aroused the most controversy about Stalin's activity during Spain's fratricide is *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (2001), part of Yale's 'Annals of Communism' series and edited by Ronald Radosh, Mary Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov. The book consists of 81 translated documents (mainly from the Russian State Military Archives and Comintern archives) concerning Moscow's agenda in Spain. The overarching thesis holds that there is no ambiguity about Moscow's agenda in Spain; indeed, the documents 'prove that advisors from Moscow were indeed attempting to "Sovietize" Spain and turn it into what would have been one of the first "People's Republics", with a Stalinist-style economy, army and

political structure', and that 'in exchange for military aid, Stalin demanded the transformation of the Republic into a prototype for the so-called People's Democracies of post-war Eastern and Central Europe'.¹² The publication of these documents – primarily reports penned by Comintern agents and destined for Comintern leaders in Moscow – has been a boon for historians as they reveal much about Soviet foreign policy as it related to Spain: 'the civil war within the civil war'; the Soviet manipulation of exchange rates to the detriment of the Republic in their purchase of arms from the USSR; the Comintern organization of the International Brigades; the nature of Soviet advising on the war front; Russian espionage in Spain; and the scope of Soviet state security operations, especially with regard to the suppression of anarchists and the POUM. While the editors rely on the documents to provide evidence of Soviet (and hence PCE) wrongdoing, they themselves acknowledge that 'Stalin did not find it easy simply to dictate events' and 'the speeches and reports from Comintern officials, while demonstrating their desire to obtain a complete hold over the [PCE], also reveal the problems that they had achieving total control'.¹³ Yet the documentary and the editorial accounts contained within the book's pages at times act at cross-currents. What emerges is a picture of the sheer difficulty of the Soviet endeavour. While the editors emphasize Stalinist imperialist designs, the documents themselves suggest that such designs remained primarily a set of *aspirations*.¹⁴

What complicates the application of Weber's explanatory schema to the case of Spain in the 1920s and 1930s is that Comintern activity there involved not only the shaping of a national communist party but the intervention in Spain's *civil war*. This means that Stalinization is conceivably applicable not only to PCE servility to the Comintern, but also Comintern engagement with the Spanish *Republic*. Indeed, much anti-communist historiography about our theme posits just this situation; that is, that Stalin 'Sovietized' both the PCE *and* the Spanish Republic, particularly during its leadership under Juan Negrín. While the Weberian formula undoubtedly describes the wartime PCE, its inability to capture the inter-governmental wartime relations between the Spanish Republic and the Kremlin underscores the tension that exists between the school that has interpreted the Soviet archival documents as evidence of Stalin's goal of controlling the Republic (Radosh, Courtois, Bolloten) and scholarship that determines that the Spanish Second Republic exercised its own agency in becoming a partner of the Soviet Union.

The loneliness of the Republic

Two convincing responses to *Spain Betrayed* are recent books by European historians, Helen Graham in England and Ángel Viñas in Spain, who have maintained the terms of the debate but reversed the angle of inquiry from which Republic–Soviet affairs might be observed. Both Graham and Viñas are engaged in deconstructing the Stalinist monolithism paradigm – one that maintains, as we have seen, that Spanish and foreign communists controlled the Republican war effort. By turning attention to the Spanish Republic as the Soviet Union’s diplomatic partner (as opposed to victim), the very idea of Stalinization is rendered but one facet of a history of international relations. In *The Spanish Republic at War* (2003), Graham continually emphasizes the demoralizing and destructive effects of non-intervention. She complements this thesis with a close analysis of communist wartime dynamism as a function not of Comintern heavy-handedness, but of two indigenous and overlapping forces. For one, the party’s hybridity, an outgrowth of the PCE’s talent to effect ‘mass political mobilization across class boundaries’;¹⁵ and second, the PCE’s ability to smooth over the internal contentiousness that plagued other groups of the left: ‘What was radical about the PCE in the war was not the content of its policies but its organizational techniques.’¹⁶ Thus, the communists looked like paragons of discipline and single-mindedness in comparison to supporters of the revolution, who balked at efforts towards centralization. In this light, it seems especially ironic that the Soviet documentation on the Spanish war presents an image of poor communications, disorganization and indecision among the Comintern agents, the PCE leaders, and between these groups and the Kremlin. As we will see, Togliatti’s reports from Spain testify to the fluid and often chaotic state of affairs during the war, an assessment corroborated by archival documents that emphasize the disparity between Stalin’s intentions in Spain and ‘what Soviet men and *matériel* in the field were able to accomplish’.¹⁷

Viñas also approaches Soviet intervention in Spain as the product of the Republic’s aid crisis. His 2006 *La soledad de la República: el abandono de las democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética* [‘The Solitude of the Republic: Its Abandonment by the Democracies and its Turn Towards the Soviet Union’] gives full treatment to one of Graham’s key points – the crucial one overlooked by Radosh et al. – that non-intervention denied the Spanish state its rights under international law. Viñas shows how as the Republican forces lost ground on the battlefield over

the course of the war, the government struggled to avoid what would be its ultimate and tragic shipwreck on the recalcitrant shores of Britain and France, with the former singled out for particular censure by the author. Coming to his conclusions through a judicious scrutiny of especially British Secret Service documents, Viñas accuses Britain of '*hostilidad encubierta*', or (thinly) disguised hostility, towards the Republic.

The war dispatches of the Comintern's chief mentor in Spain, Palmiro Togliatti (known as Ercoli, or Alfredo), complement the portrayal of Soviet-Spanish relations examined by Graham and Viñas. Readily available to researchers since the 1970s, Togliatti's reports, published in Spanish under the title *Escritos sobre la guerra de España* (and reproduced in his *Opere*), examine the war from the perspective of the Comintern leadership on the ground. These reports underscore the applicability of the Weberian model to 1930s Spain. But Togliatti's writings simultaneously throw up points of PCE resistance or inability to conform to apparatus control. What we have, then, from Togliatti is an enrichment or qualification of a Weberian reading of the PCE, one that, as we shall see, folds into it the unique Spanish exigencies of *total* civil war on the one hand, and the Spanish war's symbolic status as the locus of the European anti-fascist/popular frontist vanguard between the two world wars on the other. There is a certain irony in the fact that archival investigation confirms old hypotheses about Comintern strategy in Spain, while contributing surprisingly little to the multivalent nature of the Soviet activities there. Togliatti's long-available writings, rather than 'hidden' archival discoveries, provide a far more faceted view on this particular history of a national section's Stalinization.

Palmiro Togliatti in Spain's war

Palmiro Togliatti arrived in Spain after the ousting of the socialist prime minister Largo Caballero, whose troubled government could not survive the fallout of the violent inter-party fighting in Barcelona known as the 'May Days of 1937'. Dispatched by the Comintern in the summer of 1937 with the mission to analyse and correct the confusion within the Spanish communist leadership, Togliatti brought a new advisory ethos to the relationship with the Spanish comrades. Instead of blatantly exercising his authority from above (like Codovilla), Togliatti inserted himself in the centre of the PCE structure, attending all meetings of the central committee, advising the party chiefs and critiquing other Comintern advisers in Spain. While the military situation

was more or less stable on his arrival, the political circumstances within the left – which itself turned fratricidal with the suppression of the POUM and anarcho-syndicalists – revealed a landscape of extreme tension and chaos. Togliatti's activities and writings about the period between the middle of 1937 until the end of the war become a case study for the dual paradox inherent in Soviet–Republican and Comintern–PCE engagement. First, although archival evidence confirms the first element of Weber's Stalinization formula, that is domination of the party by the apparatus, the concentration of advisory initiative in the person of Togliatti gave way to *greater* PCE control over its own affairs.¹⁸ Second, the PCE's always troubled place on the Spanish political landscape recalls Weber's precept regarding how autochthonous German politics determined the fate of the KPD. Togliatti, in both his contemporary and reflective commentaries, suggests that Spain's long history of political infighting among socialists, anarchists and communists contributed greatly to the PCE's struggles. The *Escritos* show how Soviet aims in Spain were thwarted at every turn as a result of the nature of Spain's fissiparous left.

It is important to remember that Togliatti came to Spain not merely as another agent but as an integral *policy-making* member of the ECCI. What Togliatti learned in Spain – what he thought about popular frontism, the so-called 'democracy of a new type', and communist revolution – also came to influence the development of other European communist parties and, particularly, his innovative and at times brazen leadership of the Italian party. The Spanish Civil War thus constitutes a watershed in the history of the Comintern because it made the united anti-fascist front the priority of Soviet foreign policy and also represented the most significant and ambitious single enterprise that the Comintern ever took on.¹⁹

The *Escritos* show that as opposed to tightening the Comintern's grip on the PCE, Togliatti used his authority to implement greater self-direction, ideological reflection and strategic planning within the leadership ranks of the PCE. Togliatti urged the Comintern to call off its dogs and to allow the talented Spanish communist leaders in the *Buro Político* to actually lead. The emblematic example of this is Togliatti's sharply worded assessment sent to Dimitrov at the ECCI on 15 September 1937, which calls for a change in working methods of the Soviet advisory staff in Spain:

[There] exists a group of comrades (Uribe, Dolores, Hernández, Girola) capable of leading the party and leading it well. It is necessary

1) that your advisors do not disorientate the Spanish comrades by pushing them down a mistaken path ... 2) that your 'advisers' stop considering themselves the 'bosses' of the party, considering that the Spanish comrades are worthless, that they stop substituting for them on the pretext of doing things 'quickly' or 'better'.²⁰

Another example of Togliatti's support of the Spanish leadership involved contesting an ill-conceived directive from '*la casa*' (as the Comintern was called among the Spanish comrades) for new Republican elections in 1937, in the middle of the war. This mandate was a clear indication that Stalin was failing to grasp the reality of the communist position among the Republican parties, and therefore was vociferously rejected by the PCE. Togliatti replied to Moscow that the Republican left, in deep and mounting crisis, could not withstand further provocation or strain.

The collected *Escritos* revolve around a number of themes, but the pivotal thesis maintains that victory depended on the centralization of political and military organization in the hands of the Republican government. For historians looking for evidence of the success of Soviet imperial designs in Spain, there is little to be mined from these letters and reports. From the moment of his integration into the PCE, Togliatti charts for Dimitrov and Manuisky a course fraught with failures and errors. These include the PCE's inability to make inroads into the labour unions, the continually failed attempts to form coalitions with the anarcho-syndicalists and their National Labour Confederation (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*; CNT), the inability or unwillingness of the Negrín government to follow communist military and political strategy, the dangerously self-congratulatory tendencies of the PCE leadership ranks, and the ever-strained relations with the various socialist wings.²¹ The overarching tone of anxiety and frustration is nevertheless punctuated with praise for the ideological self-correction of the PCE, the heroism of the pro-Republican masses, and Togliatti's repeated affirmations that a robust popular front offered the only viable route to a Nationalist defeat. The urgently phrased requests for more Soviet military support ('[The] army must receive, at all costs, more planes, and more arms in general. But planes above all') become the sinister backdrop of the reports and indicate that such aid could not combat the combined effects of German air power and the abstention of France and Britain.²² Indeed, we ought to view pleas for more military and advisory assistance as evidence of a third Weberian feature of Stalinization, the financial dependence of the national party on the

Comintern. But, in the case of Spain, such financial dependence and the concomitant military support of the Republic was the single greatest influence on the PCE's wartime ascendancy and appeal. In this way, we can observe how the bureaucratic elements of Stalinization decant into the social underpinnings of affective adherence to the PCE and to Moscow.

While Togliatti's reports from Spain have been employed by historians to support the argument for Soviet influence within the Negrín government, I maintain that they support alternative readings, in particular Togliatti's thoroughgoing investment in a Republican victory against *fascism* borne out by the consistent and repeated emphasis on his efforts to inculcate both the values and the mechanics of popular frontism. In *Spain Betrayed*, Radosh recognizes that Togliatti's 'reports are of special importance', and that the Comintern adviser was 'extremely candid and forthright in his observations'.²³ For Radosh, such candour is evidence of a shrewd Comintern tactic for employing the rallying cry of popular frontism in order to divert attention away from the ultimate goals – the destruction of the dissident POUM and future communist hegemony. Radosh attributes a number of Togliatti's strategies to a penetrating communist malfeasance, while omitting one of the most remarkable qualities of Togliatti's reports – his fierce commitment to an anti-fascist victory.

Togliatti's discursive reorientation of Comintern policy in Spain was in large part successful. He created a new set of communist wartime aspirations, including the notion of a Spanish Republic that would govern as a progressive democracy of a 'new type'. With this platform, Togliatti sought to position the PCE between rural and urban working classes longing for revolutionary change, and thus avoid the disaster suffered by the KPD. It simultaneously permitted the communists to continue to try to engage the anarchists and the CNT, sustain a governmental alliance with Republicans and socialists, and rationalize its suppression of the POUM on charges that the 'Trotskyite' group operated as fifth columnists. Although the Italian's authoritarianism brought improved co-ordination between the Comintern and the PCE, the scale of total war made communication difficult within Spain and, of course, between the Spanish and the Soviets in Moscow.

The wartime rise of the communists – despite their isolation at the end of the conflict – is in large part attributable to symbolic phenomena, impossible to quantify but important to describe if we are to attempt to chart Stalinization in all its complexity. The procurement of Soviet military aid, the worldwide attention to the battles fought by

the International Brigades, and the visibility of international solidarity movements in support of the Republic and lifting the arms embargo lent the PCE considerable cachet.

'Just hearing the word "soviet" ...': militant memories of Soviet culture and Soviet aid

What can be said about how Comintern support during the war impacted on the attitudes of working-class cadres? For that matter, how might Weber's tenets be applied to Stalinization as social and psychic processes? We might think about how the PCE's success at mass mobilization appealed to persons overwhelmed by the realities of total war and the demoralization instilled by non-intervention and the warring parties of the Spanish left. In this way, control of the party by the apparatus trickled down, so to speak, in the symbol of communist discipline and pragmatism. Where Weber speaks of the national parties' financial dependence on Moscow, in the unique and crucial case of Spain, such financial dependence translates into the Soviet Union's breach of non-intervention and the highly material, visible results of Soviet aid to the Republic. Stalinization, then, is a function of cultural and social *knowledge* about what Soviet aid and advisers were doing in Spain that became a paradigm of *belief* in the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet 'rescue' of the Spanish democracy.

Communist memoirs bring alternative perspectives to the official accounts presented by Togliatti and contemporary historians alike. These narratives from the base speak to the idea of Soviet 'infiltration' as a cultural and ideological project, and suggest that the typical Spanish communist engaged with communist organizations and supported the communist wartime strategy not out of forced allegiance to Moscow but rather for the ideal held out by the Russian Revolution and Soviet aid to the Republic.

One of the most remarkable traits shared by many Spanish communist testimonial narrators (repentant and unrepentant Stalinists alike) is the surprisingly formulaic narrative employed to describe the subject's enchantment with the Soviet Union and a 'Stalinist' way of being in the world. Despite the biographical differences among narrators – and this author's desire to read for the multiple valences inherent in communist lives – the autobiographical record generally confirms a pervasive discursive pattern with regard to two fundamental points of intersection between Spanish communists and Soviet ideological and identity models: a political disposition characterized by discipline and

self-sacrifice born of the discovery of Soviet communism on the one hand, and Soviet support of the Republic which confirmed the righteousness of a communist political affiliation on the other.

In *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* (2004), the only extensive study of Soviet–Spanish cultural relations during the Stalin era, Daniel Kowalsky describes the varieties and dissemination of ‘philo-Sovietism’ in Spain before and during the Civil War. The Soviet state developed a cultural policy for Spain carried out through a variety of methods, but primarily via collaboration between Spanish pro-Soviet associations and functionaries of the Comintern:

Spaniards founded Soviet friendship societies in dozens of cities and towns. Conferences were given around the country on Soviet themes, and Soviet film festivals and art shows were organized. In short, Soviet Russia increasingly captivated the imagination of certain restless young Spaniards and emerged as a societal model through which some hoped to recast both their national and individual identity.²⁴

Anecdotal evidence of the consequences of Soviet cultural policy in Spain is plentiful. In oral histories I have conducted with rank-and-file communist women who participated in the Spanish Civil War, many subjects related how stories, poems and songs of Bolshevik heroism offered them examples of personal sacrifice and devotion to a cause.²⁵

In her memoir *El único camino* [‘They Shall not Pass’], the Civil War legend and leader of the PCE, Dolores Ibárruri, recounts how in her youth her political consciousness was formed through contact with Russian songs of worker solidarity even before the 1917 Revolution. Ibárruri remembers the socialist songs in honour of May Day she enthusiastically memorized as a child and, later, her reading of Marx’s *Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto* ‘were for me like a window that opened onto life’.²⁶

The Catalan communist Teresa Pàmies recalls how photographs of the Soviet Union enthralled her and other members of the JSU: ‘Never had so much pro-Soviet propaganda been published in Spain. The book of photos *20 Years of Soviet Life* had 400 images of the USSR. We drooled over them.’²⁷ Leonor Estévez, a PCE member during the war, attributes her political maturation to the propaganda pamphlets her brother brought home from the *Juventudes Comunistas* in 1930: ‘we frequently read pamphlets like Bukharin’s *ABC of Communism*, Lenin’s *Two Tactics, Russia Today*, or *The USSR in Construction*’.²⁸ While these

recollections point out the obvious – that young militants in Spain read and sang about and admired the Soviet Union – they emphasize the extent to which Soviet life models and political values framed the identity construction of Spanish communists at a very young age. Above all else, for many Spaniards, things Soviet came to mean the possibility of redressing socio-economic injustice at home. At a time when the Spanish rank-and-file knew little of, or rationalized, the Moscow show trials, it does not require much imagination to comprehend how emotive responses to the idea of communism evolved into mentalities and practices that included not only official membership of the party or its youth divisions, but also new ways of imagining one's social location and the experience of inner selfhood.

In her Civil War memoirs, Pàmies writes of her affection for the Soviet Union as a force that helped her make sense of her life of social and economic disadvantage:

When I was little, it seemed to me that we had to help the USSR because all the rich people and the wealthy landowners wanted to see it fail. The feeling of solidarity that overtook us as the Russian Revolution struggled to consolidate its gains was replaced by a kind of family pride.²⁹

Such family pride came to her from her father, an early leader in the Catalan communist movement. In a diary entry from 1960, he assures his children:

Even if we were disgusted by the petty politics in our own country, we couldn't ignore what was going on in Russia ... It would be some years before I really understood what the word 'soviet' meant. But just hearing it, just saying it, infused me with a kind of power or euphoria, because you know, sometimes euphoria can become power in certain situations.³⁰

Through these narratives of communist conversion, the authors claim a place for themselves in a new international community based on solidarity among workers and a revolutionary process towards their own emancipation.

In many of these memoiristic texts, anti-fascism and communism appear collapsed, especially for those who joined the PCE or the JSU after the war began. In her memoir of the Civil War, Aurora Arnáiz, a young woman instrumental in the creation of the JSU, felt instinctively the practical logic behind the communist war strategy: 'being

antifranquista was an impulse, a feeling that one had to channel by taking it to the level of *practical organization*'.³¹

If the influx of celebratory Soviet culture defined the period of initiation into communist organizations (the party and its youth divisions, or union membership), during the Civil War the pact with the communist project was consolidated through the 'proof' of Soviet integrity as evidenced by Comintern support and military aid. In particular, the highly moving volunteerism of the Comintern-sponsored International Brigades became – and remains – an international icon of communist rectitude.

Many autobiographers write in elegiac, rousing tones about seeing members of the International Brigades and their legendary defence of Madrid in the winter of 1936. Even among party members who eventually became disillusioned, the self-sacrifice of the Brigades remains one untouchable instance of the potential of heroic communist solidarity. Arnáiz writes that the Spanish Republican Army could not match the dedication of the International Brigades: 'the actions of the [Brigades] in Madrid was a heroic lesson of discipline and faith in the just cause of the Spanish people'.³²

This sentiment is repeated in the memoirs of Juana Doña, a life-long party militant who spent 18 years in jail under Franco, and whose partner, Eugenio, was executed in 1941. In her most recent book, a posthumous love letter to Eugenio, Doña's hyperbolic prose confirms her lifelong pact with the legend of the Brigades: 'They came from far off and strange lands ... Unified by a common denominator, they were combatants for liberty ... Never before has the world known such generous and solidarious people'.³³

The image of Soviet planes over the skies of Madrid is yet another *leitmotif* in the testimonies of communist militants. Doña remembers how she and her lover shared a sense of empowerment and hope aroused by the air battles: 'Dearest, the thrill of seeing the *cazas soviéticas* fighting the German bombers!' Given that the Republic lost most of its air power with the coup, the presence of Soviet airplanes seemed to many a gift of nearly miraculous salvation: 'Hugging me you said: "The Soviet Union has arrived! It would have been impossible for them not to have come to help the Republic"'.³⁴

Conclusion

Why is it that Spain lives on in the romantic imagination about communism in a way that Russia, Eastern Europe and China simply cannot? For many communists and progressives, the war invigorated

the belief in a collective endeavour for an equitable and humane society. Even today, it is in relation to Spain that so many leftists contemplate the hope and the disappointment of the communist project, as evidenced by the novels, films and autobiographies that foreground 1930s Spain as the *axis mundi* in the development of the allure of communism. Even memoirs written well after Khrushchev's 1956 'secret speech' skirt the crimes revealed by presenting a post-war communism still fossilized in the unique memory of Spain's struggle against fascism, when many people around the world felt a kind of surfeit of being through their association with the platform of the popular front and the Spanish Civil War.

I conclude with two brief reflections on how Spain became the stage on which many thousands of non-Spanish men and women worked out their relationship to their own communist identities. In his *Revolution on my Mind* (2006), Jochen Hellbeck describes how a Soviet citizen's dream about fighting in the Spanish Civil War stands as an index of his quality as a communist. In the diary entry the man recounts how in his dream he had been 'watching himself running his bayonet into fascist stomachs'. When his wife awakens him, he laments that his dream had been interrupted, for he might have 'seen heroic Madrid and the famed pilots, shooting down enemy planes ... We are with you, heroic sons of the Spanish people! Fascism will be defeated!'³⁵ Hellbeck notes that the diarist could recount the dream in his diary because it 'was fully suffused with the public spirit and therefore did not threaten the unity of his self'.³⁶

Citing another example of Soviet ideological and affective investment in Spain, Hellbeck remarks that the ethnographer Biriukov did not dream of the Spanish war, but rather was kept awake at night, agonizing over the fate of the embattled Republic. These anecdotes provide powerful testimony to the place of Spain in the fashioning of communist lives internationally. The Spanish dreams of Soviet citizens find their echo in the Spanish fervour for Russian biographies, films and propaganda present in the autobiographical literature cited above.³⁷ For other European communists, participation in the Spanish Civil War through the International Brigades constituted the highest form of commitment to the communist project between the wars. Spain was the breeding ground for communism's most stalwart anti-fascist legends, one that made (or destroyed) the careers of the men involved in military exploits there. In her book about German communists, Catherine Epstein explains how in the German Democratic Republic, a certain 'charisma' was associated with those party members

who had participated in the anti-fascist struggle which offered the Brigadiers 'a rare combination of adventure, idealism and camaraderie'. Heinrich Rau, writing from Spain in 1937, boasted to a friend: 'How am I? I have had to loosen my belt, am healthy and feel better than I have for years'.³⁸ Only those men who had either gone to fight in Spain or had survived Nazi detention camps merited a top spot in the party hierarchy. Of course, many of these men were purged soon after their return from Spain or, if they survived, dishonoured in the 1950s. Yet even those who had suffered brutal persecution, like Artur London and Arthur Koestler, the Spanish Civil War and the early exciting military success of the International Brigades reinforced allegiance to the party and strengthened the internalization of its values.

While Spanish communists were adopting Soviet scripts of selfhood, in the Soviet Union, Europe and the US enthusiasm for the Spanish Republic stood as an index of ideological integrity in the chronicles of communist lives. This reciprocal fantasy constitutes a pattern of imagined exchange that reinforced the communist ideal, while simultaneously occluding its more sinister consequences. The routes of Stalinization, then, passed through Spain and carried on them people whose communist identity would for many years bear the imprint of the Soviet–Republican alliance.

Notes

- 1 The bibliography on Soviet intervention is extensive. See, for example, G. Howson, *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War* (London: John Murray, 1998); D. Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Á. Viñas, *La soledad de la República: el abandono de las democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006); idem, *El Escudo de la República El oro de España, la apuesta soviética y los hechos de mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2007).
- 2 Prime minister Largo Caballero issued repeated appeals to the Soviets in the summer of 1936. Kowalsky writes: 'whatever may be said of the overall impact of the advisors, they did not ride in uninvited on the back of Soviet weaponry; they came to Spain because many in the Loyalist government believed they were needed to help organize the Republic's defences'. See Kowalsky, *Stalin*, pp. 316–17.
- 3 Some 16,000–17,000 served in Spain at any one time, with the height of recruitment in 1937.
- 4 H. Graham. 'Spain Betrayed? The New Historical McCarthyism', *Science and Society*, 68, 3 (2004), 365.
- 5 Some work has been done on this front, albeit without the kind of theoretical orientation now familiar to scholars engaged in 'subjectivity studies' influenced by the theories of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. See

- R. Cruz, *El arte que inflama. La creación de una literatura política bolchevique en España, 1931–36* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1999); M. Gómez, *El largo viaje. Política y Cultura en el Partido Comunista de España, 1920–39* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 2005).
- 6 Bolloten's heralded and controversial opus was published under a variety of titles, including *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1990).
- 7 F. Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 8 For a recent history of the PCE, see A. Elorza-Marta Bizcarrondo, *Queridos camaradas. La Internacional Comunista y España. 1919–39* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999).
- 9 Kowalsky, *Stalin*, p. 15; T. Rees, 'The "Good Bolsheviks": The Spanish Communist Party and the Third Period', in M. Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communism in the Third Period* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 130–64.
- 10 Although the communists were only peripherally involved in the Asturian rebellion, in its aftermath they came to be associated with the event, in part, because of Dolores Ibárruri's spectacular populist activism in the release of leftist political prisoners jailed for their involvement in the uprising.
- 11 Statistics taken from S. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, The Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 235.
- 12 R. Radosh, M. R. Habeck and G. Sevostianov (eds.), *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. xxii–xxiii. For an extensive summary of Radosh's career, see 'The Radosh File: Cold War Liberal or Red-baited Reactionary?' *Lingua Franca*, 9, 7 (1999). Accessed on line: <http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/9910/radosh/html>
- 13 Ibid., xviii–xxiii.
- 14 T. Rees comes to this same conclusion in his article, 'The Spanish Civil War: The Highpoint of Comintern Influence?', in T. Rees and A. Thorpe (eds), *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 143–67.
- 15 H. Graham, *Spanish Republic at War, 1936–39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 183.
- 16 Ibid., p. 184.
- 17 Kowalsky, *Stalin*, p. xi.
- 18 P. Togliatti, *Escritos sobre la guerra de España* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1980), p. 175.
- 19 His study of and participation in the development of Spanish communism led Togliatti to theorize (in his famous November 1936 'Sulle particolarità della rivoluzione spagnola') a 'new type of democracy' born from the popular front, in which the proletariat would establish hegemony.
- 20 Cited in Rees, 'The Spanish Civil War', p. 157.
- 21 Togliatti, *Escritos*, pp. 132–4.
- 22 Ibid., p. 200.
- 23 Radosh et al., *Spain Betrayed*, p. 370.
- 24 Kowalsky, *Stalin*, p. 161.

- 25 G. Herrmann, 'Voices of the Vanquished: Leftist women in the Spanish Civil War', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 4, 1 (2003), pp. 11–29; idem, *The Communist Memoir in Spain* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).
- 26 D. Ibárruri, *They Shall Not Pass: The Autobiography of La Pasionaria* (New York: International Publishers, 1966), p. 144.
- 27 T. Pàmies, *Quan èrem capitans* (Barcelona: Destino, 1974), p. 79.
- 28 L. Estevez, *La vida es lucha* (Madrid: A–Z, 1993), p. 70.
- 29 Pàmies, *Quan èrem capitans*, p. 77.
- 30 T. and T. Pàmies, *Testament a Praga* (Barcelona: Destino, 1971), p. 87.
- 31 A. Arnániz, *Retrato hablado de Luisa Julián* (Madrid: Compañía literaria, 1996), p. 67.
- 32 Ibid., p. 141.
- 33 J. Doña, *Querido Eugenio* (Barcelona: Lumen, 2003), p. 120.
- 34 Ibid., p. 122.
- 35 J. Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 92–3.
- 36 Ibid., p. 63.
- 37 In addition to Kowalsky, see D. Smyth's excellent "'We are with You": Solidarity and Self-interest in Soviet Policy towards Republican Spain', in P. Preston and A. L., Mackenzie (eds.), *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain, 1936–39* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 88–105.
- 38 C. Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 65. On the role of the Spanish Civil War in East German political culture, see J. McLellan, 'The Politics of Communist Biography: Alfred Kantorowicz and the Spanish Civil War', *German History*, 22, 4 (2004), 536–61. On the 'charisma' of the veterans of anti-fascist battles, see Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, pp. 154 and 232.

10

Finnish Communism, Bolshevization and Stalinization

Tauno Saarela

The terms Bolshevization and Stalinization have not been used to describe the development of Finnish communism in the interwar years because they have not been considered useful. This is not to deny the influence of the Russians or the new communist doctrine on the Finnish movement, but rather to avoid the simplification and finality that such concepts indicate. Emerging at the moment of Finland's separation from the former Tsarist empire, Finnish communism was born at once in Finland and Soviet Russia and proved willing to adapt to Bolshevism. Counteracting these links, however, was an extensive movement by West European standards, and one that remained strongly committed to Finnish labour and socialist traditions, and to the problems of Finnish society.

Other factors likewise affected relations between communists in Finland and the workers' fatherland just over the border, among them, the prohibitions and repression of the Finnish state and linguistic barriers arising from speaking a language shared with no other communist party. These national characteristics meant that Finnish communism did not fit easily into the usual pattern of communist parties falling into line with the policies of the Communist International (Comintern). Indeed, approaching Finland without these preconceptions one arrives at a paradoxical conclusion: that it was only after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 that the notion of Stalinization can, to some degree, be applied to Finnish communism. Even then, however, and at the height of the Finnish movement's 'splendid isolation' during the Cold War, the transformation was always incomplete. In this, as in earlier periods, though some aspects of Finnish communist politics may justly be described as 'Stalinized', its unevenness and com-

plexity cannot easily be reconciled with the suggestion of totality that the Stalinization concept often conveys.

Finnish communism

Finnish communism was born in Finland and Soviet Russia, and a commitment to both countries was an innate characteristic of the movement.¹ The civil war fought from January to May 1918 after Finnish independence ended in defeat for the Reds. Consequently, most of the leaders and functionaries of the revolutionary government escaped to Soviet Russia. There they concluded that the Finnish revolution had failed because they had stayed within the boundaries of bourgeois democracy. In order to overcome this, the exiles founded what became known as the Communist Party of Finland (*Suomen kommunistinen puolue*; SKP) in Moscow in August 1918.² The new party determined to abandon the previous working methods of the Finnish labour movement – working through parliament, the trade unions and the co-operative movement – and propagate instead armed revolution and the establishment of a resolute dictatorship of the proletariat. Due to its illegal status in Finland, the SKP was forced to work underground, and until 1944 its principal organs were located in the Soviet Union.

In Finland itself, a commitment to communism emerged in the summer of 1919 among those dissatisfied with the politics of the re-founded Social Democratic Party (*Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue*; SDP). The SDP's condemnation of the attempt to seize power, rejection of extra-parliamentary action and willingness to co-operate with the centre parties led many to accuse its leadership of forsaking the strict line of class struggle of the pre-civil war labour movement. After a failed attempt to secure a majority at the SDP congress in December 1919, a number of disgruntled members consequently founded the Socialist Workers' Party of Finland (*Suomen sosialistinen työväenpuolue*; SSTP) in May 1920. Subsequently, the SSTP received nearly 15 per cent of the vote in the parliamentary elections of 1922, winning 27 seats out of a possible 200. Supporters of the SSTP also boasted a majority within the Finnish trade union movement (*Suomen ammattijärjestö*; SAJ), including most of the important unions. But although the SSTP was concentrated in the traditional fields of the Finnish labour movement, its activity was soon made illegal; in August 1923, the party's central and local leadership, as well as its members of parliament, were imprisoned. From this point, the SSTP effectively ceased to function.

The proscription of SSTP – which was consolidated by the courts in 1924–25 – gave rise to discussions on the founding of a new party. Ultimately, however, Finnish communism in the 1920s was given expression through various local workers' associations which tried to keep up national and regional co-operation on the basis of socialist workers' and smallholders' electoral organizations (*Sosialistisen työväen ja pienviljelijäin vaalijärjestö*; STPV). In the period 1924–29, this loose organization gained between 10 and 13 per cent of the vote and between 18 and 23 seats in parliament before all public activities of Finnish communism were outlawed in the summer of 1930. With its representatives in parliament and on municipal councils now excluded, it was only from the autumn of 1944 that supporters of Finnish communism could again participate fully in the country's political life.

Though the establishment of two distinct branches of Finnish communism demonstrated different ideas with regard to the character and tasks of the revolutionary labour movement, the representatives of the SKP made contact with their Finnish comrades in the summer of 1919 and they worked together closely from the autumn of 1920. Some of the leaders of the SSTP and STPV belonged to the Finnish Bureau, the main body of the SKP in Finland, and some of the Finnish activists participated in the conferences of the SKP held in the Soviet Union. The SKP also provided financial support for the SSTP's and STPV's election campaigns and some of their newspapers. Despite these interconnections, the differing conditions in which the two branches of Finnish communism existed had a clear impact on their political line. Those in Soviet Russia were captured by the idea of the world revolution and found their salvation in Bolshevik ideas. In Soviet Russia, where communists were in power, it was easier to follow the instructions of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern than in Finland, where the movement sought to overcome the losses of the civil war while fighting for its very existence. As such, the decision of the SSTP to accept the Comintern's '21 conditions' of admission in the winter of 1921 should be regarded as an expression of solidarity with the Russian Revolution – an attempt to find shelter and support – rather than as a conscious endorsement of the centralized organizational structure instigated by the Bolsheviks.

Isolation and commitment

Despite a notable electoral presence – combined, the SSTP and SDP boasted 40 per cent of the vote and a parliamentary contingent numbering between 78 and 82 – the influence of the labour movement on

political and social questions in Finland was far weaker after the civil war than before. The bourgeois parties proved unwilling to compromise in their attempt to create a united national state, resorting to administrative measures and repression to eradicate opposing lines of thought. This applied especially to those who advocated revolution and had contacts with an emergent communist movement that was regarded with suspicion; social democrats, by contrast, functioned largely without interference. For the Finnish bourgeoisie, the civil war had been fought for freedom against the Russians and their Finnish supporters; communism was thus continuously linked with the Soviet Union and a possible Soviet invasion of Finland. As such, its impact on Finnish society – as an image of the enemy – was greater than the size of the communist movement might have suggested.³

Likewise, Finnish communists proved unwilling to co-operate with other political forces. Such an attitude had a strong basis in the history of the Finnish labour movement and the commitment of pre-war social democracy to unwavering class struggle and the refusal to co-operate with other parties. Though individuals in the labour movement had from 1909 onwards advocated joint action with bourgeois parties to defend Finnish autonomy, the more militant conception of class conflict had been strengthened by electoral success. Between 1907 and 1916, the social democratic vote in parliamentary elections rose from 37 to 47 per cent, with the party gaining a majority in the parliament of 1916. Though the social democratic and bourgeois parties formed a coalition government after the 1917 February Revolution, each wished to exercise power alone, as the descent into civil war in the winter of 1917–18 made clear.⁴

Significantly, the SSTP and the SDP drew contrasting conclusions from the civil war. While social democrats held that the mere existence of Finnish communism strengthened bourgeois co-operation and the resort to force, members of the SSTP accused them of being content to work within the inadequate structures of bourgeois democracy. Simultaneously, the struggle to control and direct common labour organizations sustained the antagonism between members of Finnish communism and social democrats. Above all, the social democrats' demand that their greater strength in parliament should be replicated within the trade union movement aroused fierce opposition, as did their constant threat to form separate trade union organizations. Verbal hostilities were the rule, co-operation the exception.⁵

Isolation from other political forces, on the other hand, did not indicate isolation from Finnish society. The birth of Finnish communism was connected to large questions regarding the interpretation of the

civil war and the character of the new nation state. These issues were closely related to questions of civil rights and liberties, and to the position of working people in the country. Though Finnish communism was, in a sense, connected to the losing side in the war, it retained a significant support base, as indicated by its successes in parliamentary elections and within the trade union movement. Moreover, members in Finland also became committed to the existing organs of government and, in fighting for their existence, their representation in parliament acquired an importance perhaps greater than in countries where communist parliamentary activities were not impeded.

Marxism and Marxism–Leninism

Finland had been a part of the Russian empire until December 1917. However, while the Finnish labour movement understood that the country's fate depended on the ability of the Russian revolutionaries to overthrow Tsarism, it had not regarded them as ideological or practical exemplars, but relied instead on the teachings of German Marxists.⁶ Following defeat in the civil war, however, the SKP's founders were undoubtedly captivated by the new communist doctrine and tried to disseminate it in Finland. Following the decisions of the Comintern, the SKP also passed on instructions on the character and political line of a communist organization. The banning of the SSTP and the Bolshevization process initiated by the Comintern's fifth world congress in 1924 strengthened these objectives. Though it was not safe to organize special campaigns for Bolshevization in Finland, the concept soon became familiar via various newspaper articles.

According to the fifth world congress, Bolshevization was supposed to indicate 'the final victory of Marxism–Leninism (or in other words Marxism in the period of imperialism and the epoch of the proletarian revolution) over the "Marxism" of the Second International and the syndicalist remnants'.⁷ Difficulties in publishing communist books hindered the dissemination of this new interpretation of Marxism. Nevertheless, its basic ideas were introduced via some of Lenin's writings, published in Finnish in the early 1920s, and by Stalin's *Problems of Leninism*, published in Finland in 1926. Writings commemorating the anniversaries of Lenin, Liebknecht and Luxemburg also familiarized Finnish readers with them. Even so, the priority given to communist doctrine did not entirely overshadow earlier forms of Marxism, and Karl Kautsky's and Aleksander Bogdanov's books were being used in youth study groups even in the late 1920s. Furthermore, earlier

Marxist interpretations – for example, a determinist reading of history – survived in Finland. No attempt was made to ponder whether the movement itself was ‘burdened’ with the remnants of social democratic ideology as indicated by the fifth congress. As the SDP had participated in the revolution – not ‘betrayed’ it as in Germany – there was not the same intense need to condemn it as in many other countries.⁸

Though Finnish communism was not a profoundly theoretical movement, there were areas where the influence of the new communist ideas occurred almost automatically. From the outset, the Bolsheviks had a monopoly in defining the ‘international situation’ and the ‘general tasks’ demanded by it. It was, for example, on their initiative that the Comintern declared the world to be living through a period of revolutions. Chastened at having confined their struggle within the boundaries of the Finnish state, the SKP’s founders readily accepted the ideas of the Bolsheviks. Nor did communists based in Finland voice doubts regarding such an assessment. Although they did not share the Comintern’s belief in the immediacy of revolution, they were willing to accept later Comintern assessments informed by Soviet interests. The negative, even hostile, attitude to communism of the bourgeoisie and Finnish authorities nourished the commitment of Finnish communists to the defence of the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, with regard to Comintern instructions on daily political activity, members of the SSTP and the STPV tended to interpret policy through the traditions of the Finnish labour movement. Instructions from the east did not necessarily relate to the immediate political situation in Finland, and were not always regarded as safe or reasonable. In any case, it was not always possible to publish resolutions and instructions from the Comintern. Such efforts, as with the attempt to publish the manifesto and resolutions of the Comintern’s second world congress, often led to confiscation by the police. Thus, decisions became known mainly through Finnish versions published in Soviet Russia, or from manuscript texts and other publications circulated by the underground organization of the SKP.

This, in turn, led to differing interpretations of theory and practice. The Comintern and the SKP had a tendency to overlook the practical difficulties faced by the movement in Finland and regarded the constant persecution of ‘communist’ organizations and members as a sign of the regime’s weakness and imminent collapse. In response, they urged the movement in Finland to launch a vehement challenge to the existing system. Those in Finland, by contrast, were more content with attempts to improve the legal and economic position of the workers.

Due to these divergent circumstances, Finnish communism was not very Bolshevized in terms of discipline. While the SKP leadership kept repeating that the movement in Finland should follow its instructions, there were numerous occasions where such obedience was not forthcoming. In the autumn of 1923, with the SKP and the Comintern overwhelmed by the expectation of a German October, instructions were issued indicating the imminence of revolution in Finland. Despite this, communists in Finland continued to concentrate on the creation of their own organizations and newspapers. Similarly, in the winter of 1924, communists in Finland failed to follow the SKP's instruction to base their election campaign on the condemnation of social democrats as 'traitors of the working class', preferring instead to focus on civil rights. Nor were they inspired, in the presidential elections of the winter of 1924–25, by the slogan of a 'workers' and peasants' government' and Kuusinen's nomination as their presidential candidate. Instead, priority was again given to civil rights, and a political prisoner was selected as candidate. As late as the summer of 1928, members of Finnish communism chose to ignore the SKP's repudiation of their standing on joint lists during the municipal elections.⁹

The discrepancy between theory and practice was clear. The united front was supposed to be an offensive tactic through which communists propagated demands relating to the workers' daily interests. In Finland, however, it became a defensive action geared towards safeguarding the participation of the SSTP and the STPV in the elections of 1922 and 1924. Other expressions of the united front were rare. Neither the SSTP nor the STPV favoured the sorts of manoeuvre proposed by the SKP, exposing social democrats as the workers' enemies on account of their rejection of united front proposals. This certainly was the case in the northern parts of the country, where the movement was strong and the social democrats enjoyed only limited support. The same was also true of the youth movement,¹⁰ while the SAJ's leadership was similarly unwilling to follow every instruction coming from the SKP.

It was not always necessary to say no to the Comintern's instructions; often there were none. The initiatives of the mid-1920s, especially those regarding social and welfare legislation, were formulated by the parliamentary group on the basis of SDP policy prior to the civil war. The SKP leadership did not have anything to say about this, but its impact could be felt in the parliamentary group's initial willingness to accept sickness insurance legislation proposed by the social democrats in 1927 before voting against it in 1929. However, if this change of line reflected the Comintern's adoption of 'third period' politics, it

was also due to the stronger influence of rural areas in the parliamentary group – for smallholders were not covered by the legislation.¹¹

The cultural activities of Finnish communism were also initiated mainly by the movement in Finland. Though their magazine, *Itä ja Länsi* (1923–30), published pictures and short news items about the economic and cultural achievements of the Soviet Union, it was not strongly committed to propagating the new communist message. The literary magazines *Liekki* (1923–30) and *Revontulet* (1926–30) were full of short stories, which, with their gloomy depictions of oppressed workers and moralizing about society's injustices, tended to follow in the tradition of the Finnish labour movement rather than the new communist ideas of the positive revolutionary hero.¹² Similarly, the main aspirations of the performance groups, which became very popular among young communists in Finland from 1927 onwards, drew on Finnish working-class traditions. They did share aspects with the propaganda troupes of other European communist youth organizations, as well as Blue Blouses in the Soviet Union. With their uniforms – shirts adorned with the red star and hammer and sickle – and derisive songs, they also challenged the authorities and other political groups in a way that anticipated the combative spirit of the Comintern's third period. Even so, besides supplying meagre information on other groups, neither the Communist Youth International nor the Communist Youth League of Finland (*Suomen kommunistinen nuorisoliitto*; SKNL) had much to do with the emergence and work of these groups.¹³

Organizational Bolshevization

A characteristic of the Comintern's Bolshevization campaign was to insist that communist parties shift their organizational basis from residential areas to the workplace. This demand was based on Russian experience, whereas in Finland, as in most of Western Europe, local organization had hitherto followed the demarcations of electoral districts. The same practice was at first maintained by the SSTP, but when it was outlawed the possibility of a new organizational model emerged. Communists in Finland, however, did not believe in forming organizational bases within the workplace. After a campaign was launched in autumn 1926 to found so-called electoral associations within large urban workplaces, some 30 to 40 of these were formed, but most were soon disbanded.

Certainly, the SKP wanted to build its underground organization in the workplace. Early in 1925, it set itself the target of raising the number of factory cells from 70 to 500 and, in the summer of that

year, proposed founding a party cell in every Finnish workplace. These grandiose ambitions were not achieved, however; the number of factory cells peaked at 389 in September 1926, fell to 232 in December 1926, and continued to decline thereafter. Even the figure of 389 represented only a small percentage of the 4,000 or so industrial plants in Finland, and in any case depended on dubious statistical liberties such as the claiming of a cell where just one or two SKP members were working in a particular workplace. There were, moreover, few reports of communist activity or even propaganda within the factories, and cell members preferred to work in the legal organizations.¹⁴

In terms of inner-party relations, the prohibition of the SKP and persecution of communists in Finland strengthened the position of the apparatus at the expense of party democracy. Party congresses and other meetings were held in Soviet Russia and, with the possible exception of the 1921 congress, dominated by functionaries living there. It is therefore difficult to regard them as democratic, and party representatives were nominated rather than elected. By contrast, legal organizations in Finland followed traditional democratic procedures, albeit hindered by the attentions of the state authorities.

Financially, the SKP was at first a rather affluent party because it did not hesitate to appropriate the money and property brought by the Red government to Soviet Russia.¹⁵ However, the SKP also had heavy expenses and assisted thousands of 'red refugees' in Russia and their families in Finland. As such, the money was soon spent and already, in 1920, the SKP started to receive subsidies from the Russian party and Comintern. From 1926, the SKP was financed solely by the International, and such support proved essential for its survival.

Comintern financial assistance was also important in Finland, where legal organizations were debarred from normal fund-raising activities such as organizing collections, lotteries or the sale of insignia. Though the SSTP received a considerable sum from Finnish labour organizations in the US in 1920, its election campaigns would have been more modest but for Comintern subsidies and some of its activities would not have taken place. Discrepancies still existed. As the SKP leadership was central to the allocation of the money, most of it was used to strengthen the party's underground organization and the use of the subsidy was not considered properly from the point of view of the whole movement.

Though communists in Finland did not dutifully follow the instructions of the SKP, the Comintern did not often interfere in their affairs; it settled disputes in the central committee of the SKP but issued wider

instructions on the party's tasks in Finland only after the SSTP was banned in the autumn of 1923.¹⁶ Even the instructions to the SAJ conference in spring 1926 were mainly formulated by the SKP leadership. It was, however, more usual for the SKP to develop its own interpretation of the more general instructions produced by the Comintern. In this respect, Finland differed fundamentally from countries like Germany and Britain, which were central to the Comintern's wider political perspective and often discussed in the organs of the International. It also differed from parties in the Scandinavian countries that received regular and detailed Comintern instructions.

This relatively limited interference suggests that Finland was not deemed a particularly important country within the Comintern. Yet it also reveals that the Comintern trusted the SKP to take care of the movement in Finland, often guided by discussions with representatives of the Russian party. Even so, there was never a foreign Comintern representative based in Finland, and this enabled the SKP to control communications between Finland and the Comintern. Furthermore, the character of information coming out of Finland was affected by the restrictions imposed on communist activity and publications. In any case, Finnish communism was not a movement much given to political discussion. Doubts regarding the politics of the Comintern or SKP were seldom articulated; rather, instructions were not strictly followed or interpreted in relation to Finnish traditions.

Despite this, the Comintern appeared relatively satisfied with this state of affairs until the spring of 1928, when the Polish-Baltic national secretariat strongly criticized the platform adopted by the Finns for the municipal elections of December. This criticism, alongside similar concerns regarding trade union policy, led to the 'Finnish question' coming up regularly on the agendas of the Comintern's political secretariat in 1929.

The trade union issue had its background in the Russian trade union movement's attempt to avoid isolation following the dissolution of the Anglo-Russian trade union agreement in 1927. As a result, the Russians started to advocate co-operation between the Russian and Nordic trade unions. This idea was supported by the Norwegians and Finns, who regarded co-operation as a step towards a united international trade union movement. Despite the misgivings of the 'Amsterdam' international, or International Federation of Trade Unions, an agreement on mutual co-operation and assistance was accepted by Norwegian, Russian and Finnish trade unions representatives in Copenhagen in February 1928.¹⁷ Yet, the agreement was not subsequently ratified by the

Norwegian and Finnish unions, and trade union leaders in Finland feared for the unity and even the survival of the SAJ given the social democrats' threat to withdraw should the agreement be endorsed. Even the leaders of the SKP hesitated and, before falling into line, tried to get the Russians to revise the agreement. Ultimately, although the majority of local trade union associations supported the agreement, fear of division and losing contact with the Scandinavian trade union movement meant that the agreement was not ratified by the SAJ leadership. As a result, the Comintern and SKP condemned those opposing the ratification as 'opportunists', and the Copenhagen agreement proved an important factor in the dissolution of the SAJ and Finnish communism.¹⁸

All of this took place at a time of deepening economic crisis and as the right-wing parties stepped up their efforts to exclude Finnish communism from even the slightest role in the Finnish political system. According to Comintern theory, such developments were proof of the last phase of a dying capitalism and reason for the communist movement to move onto the offensive. The communist response in Finland was muted, however. On International Red Day in August 1929, on the anniversary of the October Revolution, and on May Day in 1930, some party members did take to the streets in defiance of the authorities.¹⁹ It is true that demands to brand the social democrats and 'opportunists' within the communist movement contributed to the isolation of Finnish communism and the eventual banning of all communist activity in Finland in June 1930. This would, however, have happened even without the unhappy interference of the Comintern.

'Stalinized' isolation?

The outlawing of all communist activity in Finland prompted the Comintern to place the SKP under strict control, meaning that most of the subsequent questions concerning Finnish communism were decided in Moscow.²⁰ Communists in Finland were criticized by the International for being tied to legal forms of action and the movement was directed underground. Although the membership of the SKP passed 2,000 for the first time in 1932, it had no great appeal and only a small minority of members of the STPV joined its ranks. Its underground organization was also weakened by numerous arrests in 1930–33. Its significance in the early 1930s lay more in the fact that it kept alive the idea of a communist party.

The move to underground organization was also expressed in the SKP's formation of a 'red' trade union movement in the summer of

1931. While this was in line with Comintern policy during the third period, it also reflected workers' unwillingness to join *Suomen ammattiliittojen keskusjärjestö* (SAK), the new trade union movement founded by social democrats in October 1930. Yet the SKP initiative failed to attract members from beyond its own ranks or to provide contact between the party and the wider working masses. Other policies adopted from Comintern resolutions also failed to find support. Given that the Comintern believed the time was ripe for socialist revolution, a workers' and peasants' government was presented as an immediate goal. According to the Comintern, economic struggles in the depression developed quickly into political ones, and the communist party's task was to hasten this development to promote rebellion and civil war. To this end, the SKP and the Comintern began to emphasize economic questions and push political issues and civil rights into the background. This betrayed the inability of the Comintern to differentiate between bourgeois democracy and fascism; and while the SKP was criticized for its incapacity to fight and understand the significance of fascism, the Comintern itself failed to pay due attention to the increase in right-wing extra-parliamentary activity in Finland in the latter half of 1929. Instead, it focused on branding social democrats and 'opportunists' within the ranks of Finnish communism. Although the Comintern accused the SKP of confusing the white regime of Finland with fascism, it too labelled Finland as a 'fascist dictatorship' from the summer of 1930 to 1934.

It was only in 1933 that the SKP began to change its orientation. The strikes that broke out that spring convinced the SKP that it was necessary to enter the social democratic trade unions and, in August 1933, the party instructed members and supporters to join and form an opposition within the reformist organizations. In July 1934, the party decided to give up the 'red' trade unions entirely. The change of line, however, took some time, as many old members of the SAJ were reluctant to join the social democratic trade unions, while the social democrats were unwilling to allow them in. This reorientation was closely linked to a change in the assessment of social democrats. Up to the summer of 1933, these were denounced as supporters of fascist dictatorship, and it was only in October 1934 that the SKP was ready to speak of co-operation.

Did this period indicate the 'Stalinization' of Finnish communism? The policies and activities of the SKP undoubtedly followed the instructions of the Comintern, both into isolation and out of it. The leaders of the SKP also committed themselves to self-criticisms

concentrating on the ideological weaknesses of the Finnish labour movement in 1917–18 and the absence of a Bolshevik Party in 1918. The debate was guided by the myopic outlook of the Comintern and the Russian party leadership; the past was studied only on the basis of the shortcomings of the revolutionary party, while all estimation of circumstance, context and political power relationships was buried beneath theoretical assumptions. To mention ‘objective grounds’ was to attempt to hide mistakes, declared Kullervo Manner (the chairman of the SKP) in 1932.

Simultaneously, the establishment of Finnish courses within the International Lenin School (ILS) in the autumn of 1930 was used to disseminate Russian ideas and methods to the cadres of the SKP. These nine-month courses continued until 1938, and about 140 individuals took part in them. In the short run, however, the impact of the ILS students on Finnish communism was small, and most of those who were sent into underground work in Finland were subsequently arrested and imprisoned.²¹

But although the Comintern and the SKP expected communists in Finland to follow their instructions, this did not take place. Rather, the SKP became isolated from former supporters of Finnish communism, most of whom followed their own course. After the ban on legal organization, it was difficult for those who had supported Finnish communism to participate in political activity. Besides political suppression, the hard economic conditions, unemployment and disappearance of various forums – the closing of ‘communist’ labour halls, for instance – made any such activity difficult. Some joined the social democrats, but bitterness about their behaviour remained so strong that withdrawal from politics was often considered a better option. After all, indignation towards social democrats was the main reason why the great majority of former SAJ members had remained outside the SAK.

In northern Finland, erstwhile members of the STPV did get involved in the depression movements formed in the countryside, continuing the tradition of organizing around a particularly important issue, such as crop failure. Finnish communism was not an important actor in the so-called ‘hack rebellion’ which, in the summer of 1932, broke out in Nivala, in Northern Ostrobothnia, when peasants clashed with the police. Its influence was larger, however, in the movement in Muhos, a commune 40 kilometres east of Oulu. This gave communists in northern Finland the opportunity to participate in elections and produce a peasant newspaper.²² Elsewhere, supporters of Finnish communism became voters for the SDP against the instructions of the SKP.²³

Accordingly, it was the improvement in political and economic conditions – rather than orders from the SKP – that prompted members of the STPV to join the SAK from the mid-1930s. Equally, it may be argued that it was a group of social democratic intellectuals that led supporters of Finnish communism, and even the SKP, out of isolation. This group started to talk about workers' co-operation and the defence of civil rights in 1933–34, receiving far more publicity than the SKP. This message, along with their ability to see the differences between fascism and bourgeois democracy, won them followers within the ranks of Finnish communism – particularly after the trial of Toivo Antikainen, a member of the SKP central committee, and the change of line adopted at the Comintern's seventh world congress in the summer of 1935.²⁴ Raoul Palmgren, who was one of this intellectual group, formulated a project that focused primarily on the ideas and values of Finnish society, challenging dominant interpretations of Finnish history and the supposed continuity between the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century and that of the 1930s. Where the former had stood for political rights and liberties, Palmgren argued, the latter suppressed them. For Palmgren, the working class embodied the best traditions of the progressive bourgeoisie.²⁵ Such an approach was based on the Marxism of German leftists in the Second International. However, it also tallied with the traditions of the Finnish labour movement, and even with the ideas of Finnish communism which, from the beginning, had challenged the ideological institutions of bourgeois society.

There are other occasions when communists in Finland did not simply follow Soviet initiatives. This was evident after the Soviet invasion of Finland in November 1939, when many of them condemned the Soviet action and defended their home country even at the front. Nor did they welcome the formation of a Finnish people's government under the leadership of Otto Ville Kuusinen, who under Soviet protection returned from Moscow to Terijoki. Even Arvo Tuominen, the general secretary of the SKP, criticized the government from Stockholm.²⁶

A new beginning

These two traditions were preserved once Finnish communism secured legal status following the truce between Finland and the Soviet Union in September 1944.²⁷ On the one hand, the SKP emerged from the underground. On the other, the People's Democratic League of Finland (*Suomen kansan demokraattinen liitto*; SKDL) was a new organization to the left of the SPD formed in October by communists, socialists and

left social democrats. According to the communists, the SKDL was an umbrella organization; according to the socialists, it was a party.

The underground years had consolidated the secretive methods and preoccupation with orthodoxy of the SKP. They had also had a profound impact on the new leadership, which comprised functionaries who had attended the ILS and afterwards were imprisoned in Finland. There they had gradually taken a leading position and, on their release in 1944, took the initiative in organizing the newly legalized SKP. Contrary to the wishes of those who had re-established it, however, the SKP did not remain a 'cadre party', but with over 40,000 members by 1947 had to accept the idea of a mass party. On the other hand, there were many within the SKDL already well versed in demanding democratic measures in the labour movement and challenging the regime through open campaigning. The ideas put forward by Palmgren were of central importance in the formulation of the SKDL's ideological and political platform after 1944.

In November 1944, one SKDL representative entered the government on the advice of Andrei Zhdanov, the leader of the Allied Control Commission in Helsinki. On achieving 23.5 per cent of the vote in the March 1945 elections, the SKDL then provided the main force in a coalition government with the SDP and the Agrarian Party, both of which had been in government during the war years and accepted the 'alliance' with the Nazi Germany. These three parties issued a declaration that promised a new orientation in foreign politics, the eradication of fascism, the democratization of the bureaucracy, and the public ownership of finance capital.

The SKDL was happy working in government and through parliament, gaining positions in the state apparatus and dampening worker expectations in order to fulfil reparations to the Soviet Union. It was only in the spring of 1946 that the SKDL started to organize large demonstrations to further the realization of the government's programme. Following Soviet advice, it ceased demanding the abolition of the security police, and was eager to obtain positions for communists within its apparatus as it began to see its importance in any seizure of power. In the winter of 1948, vague discussions appear to have taken place as to whether communists should use the security policy to stage a coup; but these came to nothing, as rival parties took advantage of the situation to spread rumours of a possible communist takeover.

Following the parliamentary elections of 1948, the SKDL was ejected from government and returned to isolation. The ensuing period from 1949 to the mid-1950s marked the high point of ideological and organ-

izational orthodoxy in the SKP and SKDL, with the SKP's establishment of its cadre section, the purging of party dissidents and the introduction of the communist history concept derived from Stalin's letter in the early 1930s. Arguably, it was in line with the party's history to return to orthodoxy in difficult situations and try to solve political contradictions by means of organizational solutions.

Although the Winter War of 1939–40 showed that the interests of the Soviet Union and a small state like Finland were not necessarily identical, the representatives of Finnish communism did not try to emphasize the special interests of small states even after 1944. Rather, they regarded the USSR's victory in the war against Finland as guaranteeing Finnish communists the opportunity to work publicly. Not even the great number of Finns killed in Stalin's purges, especially in Soviet Karelia, seemed to disturb this assessment of the Soviet Union.²⁸ Thus, Finnish communists actively propagated the establishment of a Treaty on Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union and, after Zhdanov's declaration of the two camps in 1947, committed themselves to the camp led by the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

Partly because of its size, and partly because of its strong commitment to the problems of the new Finnish nation state and the traditions of the Finnish labour movement, Finnish communism had not been a favourable object for Bolshevization or Stalinization in the interwar period. Although the SKP leadership in Russia did its best to promote such an object, the co-existence of Finnish and Soviet branches of Finnish communism combined with the difficult conditions in which communists had to operate impeded such a process. It was, consequently, only after the Second World War, with the SKP's establishment on a legal basis, that the procedures of a Stalinist party were properly introduced in Finland. Though the whole movement was strongly committed to the Soviet Union ideologically, its political solutions throughout the Comintern period and after it had their basis in the traditions of the Finnish labour movement and political discussions inside Finland.

Notes

- 1 In Finland, the movement to the left of social democracy was at all times more extensive than just the communist party. Therefore, the term 'Finnish communism' is used to describe the movement as a whole, and the word

'communists', especially the expression 'communists in Finland', to refer to a larger group of persons than simply members of the communist party. On the beginning and character of the movement, see T. Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin synty 1918–23* (Tampere: KSL, 1996), pp. 26–64, 102–9, 120–92; and idem, 'Kommunistinen internationaali ja suomalainen kommunismi 1919–35', in T. N. Lebedeva, K. Rentola and T. Saarela, *'Kallis toveri Stalin!' Komintern ja Suomi* (Helsinki: Edita, 2002), pp. 9–62. In English, see J. H. Hodgson, *Communism in Finland: A History and Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967); A. F. Upton, *The Communist Parties of Scandinavia and Finland* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973). On the SKP leadership in the Soviet Union, see J. Paastela, *Finnish Communism under Soviet Totalitarianism: Oppositions within the Finnish Communist Party in Soviet Russia, 1918–35* (Helsinki: Kikimora Publications, 2003).

- 2 The SKP was originally known as the Finnish Communist Party, before becoming the Communist Party of Finland in 1920.
- 3 For example, R. Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 198–214; J. Mäkelä, 'Valtakunta vai kansakunta – repressio vai integraatio? Itsenäistyneen Suomen kontrollipolitiikasta', in T. Soikkanen (ed.), *Turun koulu. Juhani Paasivirran 70-vuotisjuhlakirja* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 1989), pp. 233–53.
- 4 See, for example, H. Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa I. 1899–1937. Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue 75 vuotta* (Vaasa: SDP, 1975), pp. 120–308.
- 5 P. Kettunen, *Poliittinen liike ja sosiaalinen kollektiivisuus. Tutkimus sosialidemokratiasta ja ammattiyhdistysliikkeestä Suomessa 1918–30* (Jyväskylä: SHS, 1986), pp. 94–102, 355–80, 424–55; Saarela, 'Kommunistinen internationaali', pp. 26–9.
- 6 J. Heikkilä, *Kansallista luokkapolitiikkaa. Sosiaalidemokraatit ja Suomen autonomian puolustus 1905–17* (SHS: Tampere 1993), pp. 48–68, 128–31, 227–41.
- 7 J. Degras (ed.), *The Communist International: Documents, Volume II, 1923–28* (London: Frank Cass, 1971), pp. 122–3.
- 8 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, pp. 199–200; Saarela, 'Kommunistinen internationaali', pp. 19–21, 30.
- 9 Saarela, 'Kommunistinen internationaali', p. 29. Sometimes these were joint lists with social democrats; sometimes, general labour lists.
- 10 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin synty*, pp. 295–307.
- 11 P. Kettunen, 'The Nordic Welfare State in Finland', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 3 (2001), 235–6.
- 12 T. Saarela, 'Oppressed Worker or Communist Hero? Characters in Finnish Communist Magazines of the 1920s', *Socialist History*, 21 (2002), 11–23.
- 13 T. Saarela, 'Luokkataistelua lauluilla', in K. Lindgren (ed.), *Ajankohta* (Helsinki: Poliittinen historia. Helsingin ja Turun yliopistot, 2003), pp. 120–39.
- 14 On these attempts, see Saarela, 'Kommunistinen internationaali', pp. 24–5.
- 15 On the money question, see T. Saarela, 'Tuhatmarkkasia, miljoonia ruplia, dollareita – SKP:n tilinpäätös 1920-luvulta', in J. Selovuori (ed.), ... *vaikka voissa paistais? Venäjän rooli Suomessa* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1998), pp. 276–95.
- 16 Saarela, 'Kommunistinen internationaali', pp. 38–41.

- 17 T. Saarela, 'Den finska, skandinaviska och nordiska kommunismen på 1920-talet', in P. Kettunen (ed.), *Lokalt och internationellt. Dimensioner i den nordiska arbetarrörelsen och arbetarkulturen*. (Saarijärvi: Sällskapet för forskning i arbetarhistoria i Finland, 2002), pp. 110–12.
- 18 In spring 1929, the social democrats left the SAJ and started to set up their own trade unions. In Finnish communism, two groups began to take shape in the autumn of 1929.
- 19 N. Parkkari, *Nuoret taistelun tiellä. Suomen vallankumouksellinen nuorisoliike 1900–44* (Kuopio: Kansankulttuuri, 1970), pp. 195–8, 220–1.
- 20 For this period, see Saarela, 'Kommunistinen internationaali', pp. 45–54.
- 21 J. Krekola, 'The Finnish Sector at the International Lenin School', in K. Morgan, G. Cohen and A. Flinn (eds.), *Agents of the Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 289–308.
- 22 M. Lackman, *Taistelu talonpojasta. Suomen Kommunistisen Puolueen suhde talonpoikauskysymykseen ja talonpoikaissiikkeisiin 1918–39* (Oulu: Pohjoinen, 1985), pp. 211–74.
- 23 K. Virtanen, *Vaihtoehtojen niukkuus. Kommunistisen liikkeen kannattajien äänestyskäyttäytyminen Suomen eduskuntavaaleissa 1930-luvulla* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 1980), pp. 24–7, 36–45.
- 24 Saarela, 'Kommunistinen internationaali', pp. 50–2.
- 25 I. Liikanen and P. Manninen, 'Realisti vai utopisti? Raoul Palmgrenin kirjallisen tuotannon maailmankatsomuksellisista ja poliittisista linjoista', in I. Liikanen and K. Sallamaa (eds.), *Palmgrenin työ* (Oulu: Oulun yliopisto, 1982), pp. 8–13.
- 26 K. Rentola, 'The Finnish Communists and the Winter War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998), 591–607.
- 27 For this period, see K. Rentola, 'The Soviet Leadership and Finnish Communism, 1944–48', in J. Nevakivi (ed.), *Finnish–Soviet Relations, 1944–48* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1994), pp. 216–48; K. Rentola, *Niin kylmää että polttaa. Kommunistit, Kekkonen ja Kreml 1947–58* (Keuruu: Otava, 1997), pp. 17–114; K. Rentola, '1948: Which Way Finland?', *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (1998), pp. 99–124.
- 28 On the purges, see K. Rentola, *Kenen joukoissa seisot? Suomalainen kommunismi ja sota 1937–45* (Juva: WSOY, 1994), pp. 23–74.

11

To Make the Nation or to Break It: Communist Dilemmas in Two Interwar Multinational States

Ben Fowkes

Historians, with some exceptions,¹ have not so far attempted to compare the communist parties of Eastern, or East Central, Europe.² Instead, they have for understandable reasons concentrated on individual countries. Even E. H. Carr's great multi-volume work on the history of the Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet Russia divides its treatment of communist parties into separate national sections for most of the 1920s.³ Yet a comparative approach may well be of value in illuminating what was distinctive about the path each party followed towards state power during the Second World War and afterwards, as well as the interplay of international and domestic factors in their interwar political trajectories. I have chosen to compare the attitude of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav communist parties to the national question in the interwar period. Though different in many ways, the two parties shared one fundamental feature as a result of their relation to the state. Both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were creations of the post-1918 settlement. They had within their borders a number of national groups, which were heterogeneous and ultimately fissiparous. This meant that the very existence of the state was in question, not just at the present, but for the future. In other words, should communists try to make the nation or break it?⁴ Or was there a middle way involving some form of federation of autonomous political entities?

There already exist plenty of valuable studies of the Marxist and communist approaches towards nationalism. But the authors of such works have generally concentrated either on the theoretical side or on ruling communist parties.⁵ What I attempt here, in contrast, is a comparison of concrete approaches taken in the period between the two world wars based largely on secondary materials emanating from the two countries themselves, though I have also made some use of the available pub-

lished sources. Historians in the post-1989 successor states have started to comb their newly opened state and party archives, but much remains to be done. As Jacques Rupnik wrote in 2002 about studies of former Czechoslovakia, 'after 1989 people were interested in themes previously considered taboo, but they didn't have the slightest interest in the history of the [Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, *Komunistická Strana Československa*; KSČ]. Now, over ten years later, one can see the beginnings of a debate on the subject.'⁶ Vítězslav Sommer was even more emphatic three years later: 'In the last fifteen years the bibliography of Czechoslovak communism in the interwar period has not grown very much, and we are still waiting for a modern treatment of this theme.'⁷ This point also applies to some extent to former Yugoslavia, though here, unlike in Czechoslovakia, the historiographical renaissance of the 1960s was not abruptly terminated at the end of the decade.

From the very start of their existence, the communist parties of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia had to make tactical and strategic choices about the national question.⁸ Those choices were determined partly by their members' past history, partly by their own response to an evolving situation and, finally, by the strategies adopted by the Communist International (Comintern). Initially, both parties treated the national question as irrelevant. There were historical reasons for this. In the case of Yugoslavia, the establishment of the state represented in one sense the fulfilment of the aspirations of the South Slav masses, the Slovene, Croatian and Serbian peoples.⁹ The same could be said of the Czechs and Slovaks of Czechoslovakia. Neither state could easily be dismissed as a mere post-war creation of Entente imperialism, which was the way the Comintern saw things from the start.

We may say, oversimplifying somewhat, that communist parties in Eastern Europe were made up of two basic elements: former social democrats who had moved left under the impact of war and revolution, and chiliastic ultra-leftists and anarchists who thought the world socialist revolution was imminent. Former social democrats in both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, even on the Marxist left, shared in the national euphoria over the destruction of the Austrian, German, Russian and Ottoman empires and the creation of unified Slav states in Eastern Europe. They did not think that these in turn would form new structures of national oppression. The ultra-leftists and anarchists, on the other hand, did not share this enthusiasm, having instead an international, or anational, perspective, in which context nationalism of any kind was simply a bourgeois illusion. So both groups, for different reasons, ignored the national question.

The situation in Yugoslavia, however, had some added complexities. There had never been a unified Yugoslav social democratic party before 1918, because party members were scattered over two empires (the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman) and two small states (Serbia and Montenegro). There were four major groups of social democrats, who adopted very different approaches towards the South Slav question. Serbian and Bosnian social democrats initially regarded the aspiration to unite all South Slavs as a bourgeois diversion from the real task of promoting the interests of the urban proletariat and a mask for what they described as 'Serbian chauvinism'. Croatian and Slovene social democrats (the latter called themselves the South Slav Social Democratic Party) adopted the classic Austro-Marxist view that the economic advantages of a large state, in this case Austria-Hungary, should not be thrown away by division into smaller national units. Federalism, they said, was a bad thing for the proletariat, and 'cultural autonomy' was the proper solution to the national question.

Despite their largely reformist position on most issues, both the Croatian and the Slovene social democrats broke away from this Austro-Marxist conception before the Great War, supporting instead the South Slav idea ('Yugoslavism'), which clearly implied some form of national revolution against Austrian and Hungarian rule. In the later stages of the war, the Croat and Slovene social democrats, along with most of their co-nationals, moved towards the idea of a united Yugoslav state to be established after the defeat of the Central Powers. This was not an option for revolution, since its practical implication was entry into a coalition with the Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian bourgeoisie. In fact, when the new Yugoslav state was set up in 1918 under the title of 'Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes', Croatian and Slovenian social democrats joined the royal government.

In the meantime, under the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution, a left wing ripened out there as elsewhere. The leftists in Croatia were strong enough to engineer a rapid split (March 1919). They were rather weak in Slovenia, and a Bolshevik opposition did not emerge until 1920. Further south, in Serbia, the party had already pursued a left course since before 1914. The Serbian party was the only one in Europe unanimously to vote against war credits in 1914, and its communist stance in 1918–19 was consistent with this.¹⁰ It, and its sister party in Bosnia, entered *en bloc* into the newly created Socialist Workers' Party of Yugoslavia (Communist) (*Socijalistička radnička partija Jugoslavije* (*komunista*); SRPJ(k)) at a unification congress held in April 1919.

This decision for communism did not imply a rejection of the state of Yugoslavia. The Serbian party accepted Yugoslavia as an accomplished fact in 1918, and the documents of the unification congress portrayed the formation of Yugoslavia as a progressive step, 'because it will quickly result in a decline in nationalist fervour and a strengthening of the class struggle'. Almost all communists accepted the idea that the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formed a single nation. The exception was the so-called Pelagić group, based in Vojvodina, which was made up of returnees from Soviet Russia who had taken part in the short-lived first Yugoslav communist party set up there. The Pelagićists viewed the three nations as separate, but no other faction shared their opinion. Hence, the sole aspect of the Yugoslav state structure criticized at the unification congress was the inclusion of areas of Vojvodina 'inhabited by German and Hungarian majorities' which Yugoslavia had been compelled to annex 'by the Entente'.¹¹ The only concrete action needed, they added, was the protection of national minorities.¹²

The reaction of the leaders of the SRPJ(k) to the rise of nationalist agitation among non-Serbs was rather curious. 'The Yugoslav bourgeoisie', they reported to the Comintern in March 1920, 'has suffered a complete fiasco in its attempt to unify the country'. As a result, the working class itself would take on the task of fighting for 'the national unity of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the Yugoslav community'.¹³ The SRPJ(k) saw the phenomenon of national conflict as merely a competitive struggle between rival national bourgeoisies, except in Macedonia. This was not the Comintern's view, even at this early period. In March 1920, the ECCI proclaimed its support for 'the risings of Macedonian Bulgarians, Albanians, Montenegrins, Croats and Bosnians against the Serbian oligarchy of bureaucrats and landowners'.¹⁴ The second congress of the Yugoslav party followed shortly afterwards (20–24 June 1920). It was the scene of a struggle between the 'centrists', led by Vladimir Bornemissa, and the 'left', led by Sima Marković and Filip Filipović, which the left won, but these factions did not really differ on the national question. Both supported Yugoslav unity and opposed a federal division of the country. Where they differed was on party organization. The centrists wanted to retain the existing federal structure of the party, while the left wanted more centralization.

A similar story could be told of the elements that went to make up the KSČ. Just as in the Yugoslav case, there was no unified Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party before the war. This reflected the divided nature of the Austro-Hungarian state. But, after 1918, in the

new state of Czechoslovakia, the two 'branches of the Czechoslovak tribe' were able to combine.¹⁵ Czechoslovakia came into existence as a result of the victory of the Entente over the Central Powers, which set off the peaceful revolution of 28 October, carried out by the bourgeois-dominated Prague National Committee. But it also received the full support of both Czech and Slovak social democrats.

We do not need to describe here the long, tortuous three-year process by which the KSČ was formed. It culminated in the holding of two party congresses, the founding congress of May 1921 and the 'merger congress' of November 1921. At the founding congress, the Slovak delegates declared: 'We stand for the unity of the Czechoslovak republic and we are decisively opposed to any autonomist attempts to split it up, which are only aimed at enslaving the proletariat, breaking up its centralized movement and allowing capital to act as it wishes.'¹⁶ When in the course of 1921 and 1922 a left opposition emerged within the party, led by Bohumil Jílek, the issue was, as elsewhere in Europe, the nature of the united front tactic and its application to the trade unions, and not the viability of the Czechoslovak state. The party left fought its battles of 1921–22 over the Šmeral leadership's policy of staying in the reformist trade unions instead of splitting from them.¹⁷ Jílek and his associates Václav Bolen and Václav Houser were expelled from the KSČ in September 1922 for continued factional agitation, but the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) countermanded this decision later as it feared the right more than the left. Despite the ECCI's bias, the Šmeral leadership remained in control, enthusiastically waving the olive branch the Comintern had allowed them to offer to the reformist parties under the heading of the 'united front'. On the national question, however, there continued to be consensus.

Even after the fourth Comintern congress had proclaimed the right of self-determination up to and including separation, the KSČ continued to stress the unity of Czechoslovakia.¹⁸ Thus, the first party congress, held in February 1923, referred to the 'Czechoslovak nation' as an existing reality, and although it recognized a right of self-determination it only called for separation in the case of Transcarpathian Ruthenia (or Ukraine).¹⁹ The inhabitants of the latter should receive 'full autonomy to decide on which state to belong to'.²⁰ An autonomous Slovakia was, however, ruled out by the first congress as 'a cloak for the endeavour to exclude the Slovak people from their cultural community with the Czech people'.²¹ As Jelinek comments, this was 'a far cry from the concept of the right of self-determination voiced by Comintern'.²²

We now return to the infant Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije*; KPJ), which was, at least on the surface, extremely successful, particularly among non-Serbs. At the elections of November 1920, it secured 59 seats (representing 12 per cent of the vote), doing five times as well as the social democrats, who gained only 10 seats. It dominated the (rather small) trade union movement. In fact, it was almost too successful, since it was banned soon afterwards by the government, as were the trade unions. The party did not respond very well to this, finding itself unable to prevent an outbreak of terrorism by youthful hotheads (the worst incident was the murder in July 1921 of the former Minister of the Interior, Milorad Drašković), which worsened the repression, then entering into a rapid decline owing to its inability to make the transition to illegality. The fall in party membership (from 80,000 in December 1920 to 688 in December 1923)²³ was nothing short of catastrophic, and there was hardly any recovery during the 1920s.

The repression suffered by the KPJ after 1921 also contributed to the growth of factionalism, although this was a general feature throughout communist parties at the time because of disagreements over the proper response to the evident failure of the initial revolutionary wave that had swept over Europe in the years between 1918 and 1920. A left opposition to the existing party leadership now developed, and the national question began to be raised for the first time. The Yugoslav leftists, led by the Belgrade journalist Triša Kaclerović, maintained that the situation was still revolutionary; that now was not the time for patient, law-abiding activities; and that a victorious revolution would replace Yugoslavia and the other Balkan states with a Balkan Soviet Republic.

The position of the left was strengthened by support from elements within the Comintern and, in particular, by the very influential Bulgarian party leaders Georgi Dimitrov, Christo Kabakchiev and Vasil Kolarov. Support for the principle of national self-determination up to and including separation would mean that Macedonia was taken away from Yugoslavia, a solution favoured by the Bulgarians.²⁴ This did not mean the inclusion of Macedonia within Bulgaria but the incorporation of the whole of the former Yugoslav territories (now divided into their national components) into a Balkan Communist Federation alongside Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. There was a certain degree of resentment in the KPJ, even among the left, against the Bulgarian communists, who were seen as unjustifiably arrogating to themselves a position of leadership of the whole of the Balkans. This is why Moša Pijade clashed with Kabakchiev at the fourth conference of the Balkan

Communist Federation in Sofia in June 1922. Pijade declared that it would be a fateful error for Balkan communist parties to stir up national conflicts because the dissatisfaction of the enslaved people of the Balkans was not yet organized. The national question would only be solved by a socialist revolution and the setting up of a Balkan Soviet Republic. Pijade later boasted that 'after two days the old man was completely exhausted and the Greek delegate told me I had taken ten years off Comrade Kabakchiev's life'.²⁵ Though the Yugoslavs won over the conference, they had less luck with the Comintern (which had a tremendous respect for the Bulgarians) and the fifth Balkan conference, held in Moscow in December 1922, adopted a resolution entirely on Bulgarian leftist lines. The communists were set the tasks of 'directing the national movement of Macedonia onto the path of revolutionary struggle' and achieving 'the autonomy of Macedonia, Thrace and Croatia within a future Balkan Communist Federation'.²⁶

In Yugoslavia itself, the year 1923 saw an intense debate on the national question, conducted in the party press and at party meetings of the Independent Workers' Party, which was set up in January 1923 as a legal replacement for the illegal KPJ. It was not coincidental that the ECCI also started to pay close attention to the national question in Yugoslavia at this time. At the June 1923 meeting of the Enlarged ECCI, Zinoviev claimed that the leaders of the Yugoslav party (not including the party chairman, Sima Marković) had no understanding of the question, and took the 'primitive' view that 'the workers have no fatherland, hence this is a matter purely for the bourgeoisie'. He compared this with similar attitudes in the ranks of the Bolshevik Party, successfully eliminated at the twelfth party congress that April – a reference to Bolsheviks who thought the setting up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was 'a step towards the liquidation of the republics, the beginning of the so-called one and indivisible republic'.²⁷ Without prescribing a particular policy, Zinoviev insisted that 'in all countries where the national question plays a role, the party should give it the highest priority'.²⁸

The rival factions in the party now developed a range of competing positions. Sima Marković advocated maintaining a single state of Yugoslavia, rejected the division of the various Yugoslav peoples on national lines, and considered that the national question could be solved by granting autonomy to local territorial units. National conflicts, he said, were contests between rival bourgeoisies: Croatian and Slovenian capital was seeking to expand its role in Yugoslavia. This was countered by the Croatian communist writer August Cesarec, who

asserted that 'the whole Croatian nation, without distinction of class, the bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the proletariat, feels itself to be nationally oppressed'.²⁹ Federalism was an answer, he added, but for the working class federation or autonomy was not a goal but a means to the genuine liberation of the people and, in the end result, to the dying out of all nations.³⁰ Leftists like Kaclerović and Djuro Cvijić continued to demand the application of national self-determination to the Croats, Slovenes and Serbs, and the transformation of Yugoslavia into a federal state within the framework of a Balkan federation. At the second party conference, held in May 1923, the Kaclerović faction gained a share in the leadership. Shortly afterwards, at the third party conference, held in January 1924, they were able to force the Marković faction out of office and gain a somewhat unstable hegemony.³¹ A resolution on the national question was issued, accepting the Comintern's policy of the right of nations to self-determination up to and including separation, but with some key reservations. The desirability of separation had to be judged in each concrete historical situation from the standpoint of the interests of the class struggle. In particular, the 'ethnographic intertwining' and 'geographical and economic links' between Croats, Serbs and Slovenes would increase the difficulty of separation. Hence, the aim would be the formation of 'federative worker-peasant republics in Yugoslavia, in the Balkans and the Danube lands'.³²

This realistic appraisal of Yugoslav circumstances differed somewhat from the position taken by the Bulgarian-led Balkan Communist Federation (BCF), which by the end of 1923 had adopted the view that Yugoslavia should be divided into its national sections. At the BCF's sixth conference in May 1924, it was stated that Yugoslav-held Macedonia must be united with the other parts of Macedonia to form an independent Macedonian state. The KPJ must ally itself with all organizations fighting for self-determination and separation from Yugoslavia.³³ The KPJ, as a part of the BCF, was obliged to go along with this, and a month later, at its fifth congress, the Comintern went further, making separation compulsory: 'In new small imperialist states' (Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Greece were named), the ECCI insisted that 'the right of self-determination must be expressed in the slogan of the separation of the oppressed nations and their establishment as separate states'. A special section of the resolution, on the 'Yugoslav question', made it the KPJ's task to fight for the right of self-determination, including separation. The objective was 'the separation of Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia from Yugoslavia and the creation of independent republics'.³⁴

Similar developments took place in Czechoslovakia, but with a year's delay. The Czechoslovak consensus on the national question remained intact throughout 1923. When the change came, it was from outside in the context of the general Comintern turn to the left that occurred in 1924. Šmeral and the rest of the KSČ leadership were now attacked for ignoring the national and peasant questions. The German Bohemian leftist Sommer wrote in the KPD party journal criticizing the Czechoslovak party for failing to call for self-determination for the non-Czech nations.³⁵ At the fifth Comintern congress, Zinoviev attacked Šmeral for 'opportunist errors and deviations' and a delegate from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia³⁶ associated himself with Zinoviev's criticisms of the Czechoslovak leadership and called for the incorporation of the region into the Soviet Union. Manuisky claimed that the Ruthenians desired to join their Soviet brothers to the east.³⁷

Šmeral's German Bohemian colleague Karl Kreibich defended his party by distinguishing between three kinds of solution to the national problem in Czechoslovakia, each appropriate to a different region. In Carpatho-Ruthenia, the party would not just proclaim the right of separation but actively work for its inclusion in the Soviet Union. In Slovakia, where there was a strong movement for autonomy but no movement for separation 'except in the minds of certain adventurers in the pay of Budapest or Warsaw' the slogan of national autonomy was appropriate. Finally, in the German settlement areas there was no movement for separation and 'even a proletarian Germany would find the German Bohemians a dangerous burden'. Here the most that the party would want would be national equality and autonomous local administration.³⁸ This more subtle approach did not find favour with the fifth congress, which plumped for a crude analysis equating all the nationally mixed areas of Eastern Europe.

As we have seen, the left within the KSČ originally developed in 1922–23 in connection with the introduction of factory cells and the application of the united front. In 1924, they began to link these issues with the national question. The leftists tended, as in Yugoslavia, to come from the nationally discontented sections of the population, in this case the Slovaks, Magyars and Ruthenians (and, to a lesser extent, the Germans). The leftist minority of the KSČ delegation at the fifth Comintern congress consisted of Neurath and Wenzel (Germans), Verčík and Čulen (Slovaks), and Fried (a Hungarian). They were backed up by a group of Czechs who were politically active in Slovakia rather than the Czech lands. Men like Gottwald and Karol Bacílek, though Czech, objected to the party's indifference to the national question

and appealed to the Comintern against it perhaps because the national question was a powerful lever they could use to prise the established party leaders from power.³⁹ After the fifth congress, the ECCI issued a resolution lumping Czechoslovakia together with Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania and Greece. They were all 'new small imperialist states' in which the duty of communists was to support 'the national separation of the oppressed peoples'.⁴⁰ There was little to choose between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, the Comintern said. Relations between the nations were similar in each case. There was 'no united Czechoslovak state. On the contrary, that state consisted of Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, Ukrainians and Poles.' The KSČ was obliged to support the struggle of the Slovaks for independence, but would not call for autonomy because this was a bourgeois slogan 'directed at the subjugation of the nations of Czechoslovakia to their own bourgeoisie'.⁴¹ The 'right' of the KSČ was strongly opposed to this position, but unable to win over the congress with its objections.

At the fifth congress, the left opposition had (as E. H. Carr pointed out)⁴² 'maintained a masterly silence' on the national question; this did not last. The Comintern's criticisms of the KSČ were a good opportunity for the left to demonstrate loyalty to the ECCI and, if they were non-Czechs, to give vent to their national sentiments. Julius Verčík accused the Šmeralists of discriminating against Slovakia.⁴³ Gottwald, who was a Czech by nationality but a delegate from the Slovak regional organization, demanded the complete separation of Slovakia from the Czechoslovak state.⁴⁴ On 15 October 1924, the ECCI softened its earlier resolution by offering the possibility of national autonomy within Czechoslovakia rather than separation; but it also censured two members of the party right, Karl Kreibich and Břetislav Hůla, for deviating on the national question.

There was at first considerable opposition within the KSČ to the policy imposed by the ECCI. Šmeral issued an eloquent warning at a meeting in Kladno in September 1924 against 'mechanically transferring a solution correct in one state to another state without examining the concrete conditions'.⁴⁵ Even in Slovakia, the influential group of intellectuals around the journal *DAV* opposed the idea of independence. 'Slovakia lacks class-conscious workers', wrote Vlado Clementis, 'hence the backward nationally-minded classes of the Slovak nation will abuse the slogan of independence' for their own ends.⁴⁶ The Šmeral-Kreibich leadership was obliged unwillingly to fall into line with the Comintern on the national question, and the second party congress (held in October and November 1924) accordingly issued a 'Resolution

on the National Question' in which it utterly condemned the theses of the previous congress as opportunist and contrary to the principles of the Comintern. According to the resolution: 'The fact that the Czech nation has had its state independence only for a few years has resulted in nationalistic tendencies within the Czech proletariat.' The KSČ had failed to confront these. In future, the KSČ would not accept the bourgeois conception of a 'Czechoslovak state nation', which was a cover for colonial exploitation and the bloody repression of Slovakia and Ruthenia.⁴⁷ The party's resolution on the fifth congress criticized the 'inconsistencies and opportunist errors' of the KSČ in the national question and proclaimed 'complete agreement' with the national theses of the Comintern.⁴⁸ You could not go much further, in words at least. In practice, things may have been different to judge by complaints from Slovak and Ukrainian delegates in 1925 about the 'passivity of the party leadership in the national question', which the Slovak Karol Bacilek claimed reflected 'unconscious hostility' to the Comintern's position.⁴⁹

The context of these decisions should be recalled. The years 1923 and 1924 saw leftists take over most of the communist parties in Europe; the Comintern's response (and to some extent also the response of ordinary party members) to the defeat of the German October was, paradoxically, to insist on the imminence of revolution and, accordingly, to shift away from united front politics towards a more leftist position. Existing party leaderships in France, Germany and Poland, which had conducted united front policies, were now castigated for 'opportunism' and removed from office. At the same time, however, the united front was continued in Eastern Europe in the shape of an alliance, not with social democracy, which was, except in Czechoslovakia, insignificant, but with peasant and nationalist parties. 'Left' factions, having come to power, pursued the united front policies they had denounced a year before, but with different partners.⁵⁰ As a plenum of the Central Committee (CC) of the KPJ proclaimed in November 1924, 'Balkan peasant movements have an objectively revolutionary character, even when they are under the dominant influence of the bourgeoisie'.⁵¹ In Czechoslovakia the situation was different, though the ECCI's policy was similar. Up to 1924, the KSČ leaders tended to think that their great success in recruiting industrial workers made it unnecessary to pay much attention to the peasantry. Only 3 per cent of party members were peasants in 1924, and they were taken to task at the fifth congress by Vasil Kolarov for failing to split the Agrarian Party and bring over its left wing to communism.⁵² The

point was that in Czechoslovakia, unlike Yugoslavia, the main peasant party was not in opposition to the state; it was part of the governing coalition throughout the 1920s. There was, therefore, no prospect of an alliance with it.

The policy of alliance with peasant parties did not prove very effective in either country. After a while, the peasant and nationalist parties showed that they were unreliable allies, quite likely to turn round and make coalitions with the governments they were supposed to be fighting. The disappointment was keenly felt in Yugoslavia. The entry of the Croat Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*; HSS), into a Yugoslav cabinet in July 1925, as well as the shift to the right in the Comintern, weakened the left's position at the head of the party and forced the compromise of May 1926 with the 'right' Marković faction. Marković now had to share power with the left and confess his 'Luxemburgist' errors on the national question, but he was able to soften the extreme demand put by the left for the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the formation of independent Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian and Montenegrin republics.⁵³ Instead, the party merely called for a 'federation of worker-peasant republics in the Balkans' and outlined various necessary measures to secure national equality: a rather moderate programme, which was intended to allow 'the renewal of the Croatian national peasant front in the spirit of the popular slogans of the Croat Republican Peasant Party'.⁵⁴ This was, in effect, an attempt to carry out a united front with the left of Radić's HSS.

The 1926 compromise did not settle the factional conflict in the Yugoslav party. This was only brought to an end by the intervention of the ECCI's political secretariat at the Moscow meeting of April 1928. Dimitrov and Remmele told the conference that the factional struggle had no real principled basis and was just a personal quarrel. As a result, both factions were removed from the leadership and Sima Marković received a 'written summons to come to mother' (Moscow), which was a way of reducing his local influence.⁵⁵ The party's position on the national question did not change, however.

The Czechoslovak communists did very well in the November 1925 elections. With 13.2 per cent of the vote they were in second place overall, doing best in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia (where they became the largest party with 30.8 per cent of the vote). This indicates their appeal to discontented ethnic minorities, but also to the less developed and more impoverished eastern part of the country (they did not do particularly well in the German areas of the more developed west).⁵⁶ There is a clear similarity here to the situation in Yugoslavia,

where the only electoral test (1920) resulted in a similar pattern of support, with the less developed south and east of the country giving strong support to the KPJ.

The KSČ was not the only party to increase its vote in November 1925. The Slovak Populists (the Hlinka Party) did even better, with 34.3 per cent of the vote in Slovakia. There was the possibility of an alliance between the KSČ and the Populists within the framework of the united front tactic, which was enjoying its heyday at the time. However, there were two obstacles: the presence of a fascist-inclined wing (led by Professor Tuka) in what was in any case a conservative, clerical party and, more importantly, the failure of the Populists to stay in opposition. They decided to enter the government coalition in 1926. Some of the leftists in the KSČ hoped to appeal to Slovak national feeling by accusing the Populists of betrayal and escalating their opposition to Czech rule. In July 1926, a party conference in Žilina (Slovakia) issued a proclamation calling for the inclusion of an independent Slovakia in the USSR; the Czechs should leave the country immediately.⁵⁷ Julius Verčík, who was regarded as the author of this manifesto, was later criticized and demoted for pandering to Slovak nationalism, although it was revealed in 1964 that it was actually Klement Gottwald who was responsible. His silence about this probably helped to bring him to the top of the party.⁵⁸

For the next few years the policy of both the KSČ and the KPJ on the national question continued to be the full application of the right of self-determination including separation. There was, however, a change in tactics. With the decline after 1928 of the idea of the united front and the sharp turn to the left taken at the fifth party congress in 1929, the policy adopted by the KSČ was one of isolated action: communists would themselves take the lead in the fight for the separation of the oppressed minorities from Czechoslovakia; in other words, attempt to break up the country. National liberation and the fight against 'Czech imperialism', the KSČ warned at its sixth congress in March 1931, should not be conducted in isolation from the class struggle. This meant no co-operation with the 'social fascists', but did not exclude a united front with the right-wing nationalists of the Slovak People's Party. In fact, the Slovak communist writers associated with the journal DAV stressed the Slovak identity they had in common with the People's Party, even holding a joint congress with them in 1932.⁵⁹

In Yugoslavia, the coming of the 'third period' – though it brought great changes in other respects – did not alter the basic elements of communist strategy towards the national question. The criticisms

directed by Josip Broz (Tito) and Andrija Hebrang at the eighth conference of the Zagreb district party in February 1928 against both the 'right' and 'left' factions of the KPJ leadership (and taken up by Dimitrov in his remarks at the Moscow conference of April 1928) related far more to inactivity and what were regarded as pointless and personalized factional quarrels than to their national policies.⁶⁰ These continued to be directed towards the destruction of Yugoslavia as a state and its replacement by 'independent republics within a Balkan federation of worker-peasant republics'.⁶¹ There was some change in the way they proposed to implement these proposals, however. In the spirit of the third period, the mid-1920s policy of a united front with democratic and bourgeois peasant parties was abandoned. The conditions were now favourable for an armed uprising, and the party's only possible allies were the groups of 'national revolutionaries' who it was claimed were equally oriented towards taking up arms against the Yugoslav 'military fascist' regime introduced on 6 January 1929. Armed action followed, in which the newly elected party leader Djuro Djaković lost his life. The fact that 'national revolutionary movements' like the Croat Ustaše movement and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) were allied with fascist powers did not seem to matter. But they were also unwilling to follow the party's lead in mounting insurrections. This did not go unnoticed by the former leftist Djuro Cvijić, who wrote in November 1932 to the CC that he doubted whether a 'national revolutionary movement' even existed in Yugoslavia. The slogan of the destruction of Yugoslavia, he added, reversing his former position, should no longer be the main feature of the party's agitation.⁶² These criticisms were ignored by the party, now led by Milan Gorkić, a Bosnian communist of Czech origin (real name Josip Čižinski), and it continued to agitate throughout the third period for the division of Yugoslavia into its national components.

This attitude started to change in the summer of 1935. At a plenum of the CC held in June 1935 in Split, the point made earlier by Cvijić about the absence of mass-based 'national revolutionary movements' was now accepted. Alliances should be made with other groups, 'without making the acceptance of the slogan of independence for Croatia, Slovenia etc. a prerequisite'.⁶³ The third period was eventually brought to a definitive end for both parties by the turn to the popular front announced at the seventh Comintern congress in July 1935. Communist policy now underwent a complete transformation and returned to the support for the national unity of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia that had characterized it in the immediate post-war years.

For the KSČ this was not a painful transition. The party responded by abandoning its agitation for separation and issuing a programme for the settlement of all nationality questions in Czechoslovakia (6 November 1936), giving some autonomy to the Germans, Slovaks and Ruthenians and national rights to the smaller ethnic groups such as Hungarians and Poles. This was all within the framework of a united Czechoslovak state.⁶⁴ At the same time, the separatist tendencies of Slovak and Ruthenian nationalists were condemned as weakening the struggle against fascism.⁶⁵

For the KPJ the change to the popular front was more difficult, particularly for Milan Gorkić.⁶⁶ The party gradually and unwillingly moved towards acceptance of Yugoslavia in the face of the greater danger from fascism. Thus, as late as April 1936, a CC plenum decided that it would be a 'great political mistake' to support the integrity of the Yugoslav state in present circumstances. Croats, Slovenes and the others, the plenum added, could only remain in a common state with the Serbs 'on condition that the domination of one nation (the Serbs) over the others is removed'.⁶⁷ Soon afterwards, the Comintern stepped in to condemn the KPJ for 'continuing its old orientation towards separation', which 'would only benefit the Fascists'. The party must now expose the fascist role of the so-called 'national revolutionary movements' in Macedonia (the VMRO,) and Croatia (the Ustaša), and call for an all-Yugoslav constituent assembly.⁶⁸ The KPJ now finally came into line. In January 1937, its CC adopted a resolution stating that 'every effort to break up the present day state territory gives assistance to fascism and is contrary to the vital interests of all the nations of Yugoslavia'.⁶⁹ This did not mean that the national question was to be ignored. On the contrary, the fight for equality of national rights, and for the self-determination of the nations of Yugoslavia, continued to be stressed. The solution now advanced was autonomy within the framework of a Yugoslav federation, and this remained the objective through all the vicissitudes of civil war and post-war seizure of power. It was strikingly similar (in formal terms at least) to what Marković had proposed back in 1923.

Comparison between the evolution of the two parties' policies towards the national question shows many similarities, despite the great differences that existed in the context of their activities. One was a mass party, the second or third largest communist party in Europe, and the largest in proportion to the country's population (with 93,000 paid up members in 1925, falling to 40,000 in 1931);⁷⁰ the other was for most of the 1920s little more than a sect (with 2,300 members in 1925 and 1,000 at the end of 1932),⁷¹ showing very little sign of the great future that was in store for it. One operated openly and legally;

the other was from 1921 onwards illegal. Yet, in both cases, the communist party began its career in 1919–21 with indifference towards the demands of the ethnic minorities and a general acceptance of the given state framework; both started in 1922–23 to make a serious effort to arrive at a correct analysis of the national question and an appropriate policy; and, after 1924, both parties adopted a sectarian and unrealistic set of slogans aimed at the fragmentation of the country into its ethnic components. In both cases, experienced party leaders (Šmeral in the KSČ and Marković in the KPJ) stubbornly defended their views in 1924–25 in the highest international forum, twice clashing publicly with Stalin, before being demoted soon afterwards because they wanted to solve the national question while retaining the existing state framework.⁷² Marković was denounced for allegedly reducing the national question to a ‘merely constitutional issue’, Šmeral for advocating ‘decentralizing reforms’ as a solution.⁷³

The post-1924 shift was associated in each case with the triumph of a left opposition and, in each case, the victorious faction could only achieve its goals with support from the central authority of the Comintern acting through its executive committee. This body was in turn responsible in practice – though not in theory – to the leading Bolsheviks in Moscow, and therefore increasingly to Stalin himself. Thus, the developments we have outlined fit well with the general pattern of Stalinization as described by Hermann Weber for the KPD. In the ten years after 1924, as we have seen, the Comintern was obliged to intervene a number of times to ensure that each party actually applied the line of support for separatist movements in practice, and that the appropriate local leadership was in place to do this. Finally, after a decade of separatist agitation, the two parties moved towards a popular front policy which once again implied acceptance of national unity. After spending their earlier years trying to ‘break the (bourgeois) nation’, the communists of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia turned to the task of ‘making the (socialist) nation’. In the short run, over the course of the Second World War and the subsequent seizure of power, they succeeded. In the long run, under the altered conditions of the late twentieth century, they failed.

Notes

- 1 An exception is Geoffrey Swain, who compares the Yugoslav and Latvian parties in ‘Wreckage or Recovery: A Tale of Two Parties’, in M. Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 129–51.

- 2 I shall use the term 'Eastern Europe' for convenience, avoiding the more precise, but excessively long-winded, expression 'East Central and South East Europe'.
- 3 E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country, 1924–26*, Vol. 3, pt. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1964); idem, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926–29*, Vol. 3, pt. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1976).
- 4 With apologies to Andrew Wachtel, who has examined the dilemma in the Yugoslav cultural context in his remarkable book, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 5 R. R. King, *Minorities under Communism: Nationalities as a Source of Tension among Balkan Communist States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); W. Connor, *The National Question in Marxist–Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); A. Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution 1919–53* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- 6 J. Rupnik, *Dějiny komunistické strany československa. Od počátků do převzetí moci* (Prague: Academia, 2002), p. 13.
- 7 V. Sommer, in Z. Kárník and M. Kopeček (eds.), *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v československa*, Vol. 5 (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, Dokořán, 2005), pp. 349–50.
- 8 I. Banac, 'The Communist Party of Yugoslavia during the Period of Legality, 1919–21', in I. Banac (ed.), *The Effects of World War I: The Class War after the Great War; The Rise of Communist Parties in East Central Europe, 1918–21* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 188–230; H. G. Skilling, 'The Formation of a Communist Party in Czechoslovakia', *The American Slavic and East European Review*, 14 (1955), 346–58; B. Fowkes, 'The Origins of Czechoslovak Communism', in Banac (ed.), *The Effects of World War I*, pp. 53–84; B. Wheaton, *Radical Socialism in Czechoslovakia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- 9 I. Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).
- 10 Banac has expressed some doubts about the consistency of the Serbian social democrats' behaviour during the war, on the ground that it did not attempt to sabotage the war effort or instruct its members not to fight. See Banac, 'The Communist Party of Yugoslavia', pp. 218–19.
- 11 Proclamation by the CC of the SRPJ(k), December 1919, quoted in D. Lukač, *Radnički pokret u Jugoslaviji i nacionalno pitanje 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu Istoriju i NIP Export-Press 1972), p. 37.
- 12 Ibid., p. 25.
- 13 Ibid., p. 35.
- 14 J. Pleterski, 'Nacionalno pitanje u Jugoslaviji u teoriji i politici KPJ–KPS', *Jugoslovenski Istorijski Časopis*, 1–2 (1969), 32.
- 15 In May 1918, Slovak social democrats described themselves as 'the Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak tribe'. See Y. A. Jelinek, *The Lust for Power: Nationalism, Slovakia and the Communists, 1918–48* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 3.
- 16 *Protokoly ustavujícího a slučovacího sjezdu KSČ (14–16. května 1921, 30. října – 2. listopadu 1921)*, (Prague: Nakladatelství Svoboda, 1981), p. 207.

- 17 K. McDermott, *The Czech Red Unions, 1918–29: A Study of their Relations with the Communist Party and the Moscow Internationals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
- 18 *Protokoll des IV. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale Petrograd–Moskau vom 5. November bis 5. Dezember 1922* (Milan: Feltrinelli Reprint, 1967), p. 60.
- 19 It was the practice in Czechoslovakia to refer to Ukrainians as Ruthenians or 'Rusyns'. See P. R. Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus, 1848–1948* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). Neither the KSČ nor the Comintern ever referred to this difference, and the communists' objective soon became not Ruthenian independence but the transfer of Subcarpathian Ruthenia from Czechoslovakia to Ukraine, hence to the Soviet Union. This finally happened in 1944, and the area is now part of independent Ukraine.
- 20 V. Mencl, *Na cestě k jednotě* (Prague: Nakladatelství Politické Literatury, 1964), p. 284.
- 21 *Protokol prvního řádného sjezdu komunistické strany československa* (Prague: Nakladatelství Svoboda, 1989), p. 14.
- 22 Jelinek, *Lust for Power*, p. 10.
- 23 I. Avakumovic, *History of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1964) p. 185.
- 24 S. E. Palmer Jr. and R. R. King, *Yugoslav Communism and the Macedonian Question* (Hampden, CT: Archon Books, 1971).
- 25 B. Gligorijević, *Kominternu Jugoslovensko I Srpsko Pitanje* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1992), p. 86.
- 26 J. Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883–1936* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 178.
- 27 E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–23*, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 404.
- 28 *Protokoll der Konferenz der erweiterten Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale, Moskau 12–23 Juni 1923* (Feltrinelli Reprint, 1967), pp. 29–31.
- 29 Gligorijević, *Kominternu Jugoslovensko*, p. 124.
- 30 Lukač, *Radnički pokret u Jugoslaviji i nacionalno pitanje*, p. 148.
- 31 See the minutes of the third conference, in Gligorijević, *Kominternu Jugoslovensko*, p. 136.
- 32 *Istorijski Arhiv KPJ*, II, p. 70.
- 33 G. Vlačić, *Jugoslavenska revolucija I nacionalno pitanje, 1919–27* (Zagreb: Izdanja Centra za kulturnu djelatnost, 1984), pp. 128–9.
- 34 'Resolution on the National Question in Central Europe and the Balkans', see Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, pp. 89 and 216.
- 35 *Die Internationale*, 20 May 1924.
- 36 His name was Vasiliev, but nothing more seems to be known of him. Šmeral described his accusations as completely unjustified and harmful to the party. See *Protokol II. Řádného sjezdu komunistické strany československa 31.X.–4.XI. 1924* (Prague: Nakladatelství Svoboda, 1983), p. 696.
- 37 Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, pp. 177–8.
- 38 *Fünfter Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale* (Milan: Feltrinelli Reprint, 1967), p. 662.
- 39 Jelinek, *Lust for Power*, p. 11.

- 40 Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, pp. 89–90.
- 41 V. Kral (ed.), *Cesta k leninismu. prameny k dějinám KSČ v letech 1921–29* (Prague: Academia, 1971), p. 108.
- 42 Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, p. 178.
- 43 Kral, *Cesta k leninismu*, p. 124.
- 44 Gottwald, article in *Pravda Chudoby*, 30 July 1924, printed in Z. Holotíková (ed.), *Klement Gottwald a slovensko. Články z rokov 1921–24* (Bratislava: Nakladateľstvo Pravda, 1973), p. 193.
- 45 *Protokol II. Řádného Sjezdu*, p. 712.
- 46 Z. Holotíková, 'The Slovak Question and the Czechoslovak Communist Party in pre-Munich Czechoslovakia', *Studia Historica Slovaca*, 4 (1966), 152.
- 47 *Protokol II. Řádného sjezdu*, p. 31.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 49 Gosiorovský, 'K niektorým otázkam vzťahu čechov a slovakov v politike komunistickéj strany československa', *Historický Časopis*, 16, 3 (1968), 363.
- 50 G. D. Jackson, *Comintern and Peasant in East Europe, 1919–30* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).
- 51 I. Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 58.
- 52 *Funfter Kongress*, Vol.1, p. 749.
- 53 Gligorijević, *Komintern Jugoslovensko*, p. 197.
- 54 *Istorijski Arhiv KPJ*, II, pp. 108–12.
- 55 Gligorijević, *Komintern Jugoslovensko*, p. 235.
- 56 Z. L. Suda, *Zealots and Rebels: A History of the Ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1980), pp. 82–93.
- 57 J. Krámer and J. Mlynárik, 'Revolučné hnutie a národnostná otázka na slovensku v dvadsiatých rokoch', *Historický Časopis*, 13, 3 (1965), 437–9.
- 58 J. Mlynárik, 'K niektorým otázkam revolučného hnutia v československa v rokoch 1918–38', *Československý Časopis Historický*, 12 (1964), 209.
- 59 A. Kusák, *Kultura a politika v československa 1945–56* (Prague: Torst, 1998), p. 456.
- 60 Banac, *With Stalin*, p. 59.
- 61 Lukač, *Radnički pokret u Jugoslaviji i nacionalno pitanje*, p. 243.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 254, quoting a letter dated 27 November 1932.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 292.
- 64 Suda, *Zealots and Rebels*, p. 143.
- 65 Gosiorovský, 'K niektorým otázkam, 366–7; V. Kulíšek, 'Úloha čechoslovakizmu ve vztazích čechů a slovaků 1918–38', *Historický Časopis*, 12, 1 (1964), 71.
- 66 N. Jovanović, 'Je li u razdoblju 1934–37 M. Gorkić bio protiv jedinstvene jugoslovenske države?', *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 15, 1 (1983), 85–6.
- 67 Gligorijević, *Komintern Jugoslovensko*, p. 323.
- 68 *Istorijski Arhiv KPJ*, II, pp. 399–400.
- 69 Banac, *With Stalin*, p. 65.
- 70 Suda, *Zealots and Rebels*, pp. 81 and 131.
- 71 Avakumovic, *History of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia*, p. 185.

- 72 Stalin clashed with Marković at the Yugoslav commission of the fifth enlarged ECCI in March 1925; Marković defended himself in a subsequent article, to which Stalin also replied (Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, pp. 402–3). The same situation occurred in the Czechoslovak commission: Stalin criticized Šmeral, Šmeral replied, and Stalin returned to the charge a few days later (Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, pp. 374–5).
- 73 J. Rupnik, *Dějiny komunistické strany československa*, p. 75.

12

Testing the Limits: Stalinization and the New Zealand and British Communist Parties

Kerry Taylor and Matthew Worley

The study of international communism lends itself quite neatly to comparative analysis. Here was an international movement to which affiliated national parties committed themselves to a highly centralized organizational model, and which prided itself on a disciplined political and theoretical unity. To this end, and in principle at least, similar processes – underpinned by a uniform policy and theory – were working simultaneously, yet they did so in a variety of contexts across the world. Predictably, therefore, communists and communist parties had both similar and divergent experiences as they endeavoured to follow the example set by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the ramifications of which historians have only really begun to explore in depth since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. With regard to Stalinization, it is only via a comparative approach that we may be able to assess the extent and limits of Hermann Weber's thesis as a transferable model.

This chapter will consider the cases of the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ) and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). For both, the prevalent trend within the historiography has been towards outlining a far more complex and negotiated relationship between the national parties and Moscow than hitherto acknowledged.¹ Broadly speaking, historians have tended to take the parties' general loyalty to the Comintern and the prevailing Soviet leadership as a 'given', focusing instead on the contexts in and means by which party members at all levels understood, adopted and carried out communist policy as directed – until 1943 – by the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) and the Comintern world congress. All accept the defining influence of the Soviet Union, but the recognition of certain incongruities – alongside questions of personal-political identity, context and the practical transformation of theory

into practice – has ensured that historians now appreciate that an intricate intermeshing of social-economic, cultural, personal and political forces need to be taken into account in order to construct a viable and coherent history of communism.² There are exceptions. In one recent article, Alexander Trapeznik argued that the CPNZ did not deviate from a ‘strict Stalinist’ discipline; that the CPNZ’s relationship with the Communist International (Comintern) was one simply of ‘subordination and control’; and that the party’s activities were ‘directed by a foreign power and its agents’, going so far as to suggest that notions of ‘monolithism’ and ‘totalitarianism’ are as ‘applicable as they ever were’.³ But such reductionist analysis has become rare, replaced by a more suitably nuanced and wider-ranging approach to one of the defining movements of the twentieth century.

Here, therefore, we shall focus on certain mechanisms of Comintern authority, asking whether the fact that a ‘lever’ existed is enough to prove that the full potential for control was exercised. In the New Zealand context, it will be argued that both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of Trapeznik’s argument do not stand up to close scrutiny. In the British, the diachronic inconsistencies and practical limitations of the Stalinization thesis will be highlighted to suggest that too rigid a conception can distort understanding of the CPGB. More broadly, such analysis raises questions as to the extent to which distance/geographical position informed relations within the Comintern and, thereby, the uniform nature of any Stalinization process. Of course, Stalinization does not begin and end with the notion of Comintern control, though it is central to most analyses. It is hoped that this chapter will at least help facilitate more creative engagement with the concept of Stalinism and, more generally, widen the context in which communist politics are portrayed and understood.

The case for comparison

The two communist parties under consideration provide a useful basis to explore a supposedly ‘monolithic’ process. The general context in which the parties operated was very similar. The population of New Zealand was largely derived from Britain; the most significant ethnic group beyond this was a proportion of Irish immigrants. While the existence of an indigenous population gave the New Zealand demographic context some distinctiveness, for the most part the Maori were not a significant part of the CPNZ’s membership.⁴ Being a former colony of Britain, English was the official language of New Zealand and

the basic political and legal systems were largely the same, although New Zealand remained a Dominion until after the Second World War, only adopting the Statute of Westminster in 1947. Even in the context of 'full independence', New Zealand remained a constitutional monarchy with the Queen as sovereign.⁵

Within the administrative structure of the Comintern there was also convergence, as both parties were overseen by the Anglo-American Secretariat (AAS). In such a context, it is not unreasonable to assume that they were subject to a similar set of organizational, political and administrative pressures. That said, the CPNZ did not in fact affiliate to the Comintern until 1928, suggesting that it experienced a different formative relationship with the International than did the CPGB. Even so, both parties subscribed to the 21 conditions of entry to the Comintern, and both committed to and sought to follow a political and theoretical 'line' in keeping with the international movement (from united front through to the 'third period', onto the adoption of the popular front, opposition to imperialist war and, finally, unbounded support for a people's war).⁶ Direct links between the two parties were reasonably close. For a period the CPGB was considered to have a special administrative responsibility for the New Zealand party, revealing the greater importance granted by the Comintern to the CPGB as a party acting within one of the world's leading imperial powers. There was also some interchange of membership between the parties as a result of immigration both ways,⁷ although the fact that the CPGB was a European party meant that it actually experienced a greater interchange of personnel with parties such as the French and German than it did with the CPNZ. Finally, both parties acted legally within their national contexts but formed a minority within a labour movement generally resistant to communist influence.

Levers of control

Trapeznik's case in favour of a monolithic Stalinist model provides us with four purported levers of control to measure the extent to which the Comintern exerted its authority over the CPNZ, all of which may be related to the CPGB. These are: 1) surveillance, supervision and monitoring; 2) provision of propaganda material; 3) directly influencing the leadership; and 4) financial aid. There can be no doubt that the Comintern did indeed seek to exercise maximum authority over its national sections; nor that the Soviet leadership and Soviet priorities dominated the Comintern. Nevertheless, qualifying remarks are needed

if we are to appreciate the effectiveness of the various control mechanisms and their relation to any uniform or 'total' process of Stalinization.

Surveillance, supervision and monitoring

Through the AAS and, later, the Marty Secretariat, the Comintern endeavoured to keep a close watch on both the antipodean and British parties. The CPNZ and CPGB each sent extensive documentation – including party publications, reports and national committee minutes – to Moscow, which the Comintern analysed and responded to. Further monitoring occurred when New Zealand and British party members enrolled in the International Lenin School (ILS) from 1926, or attended the various conferences, plenums and commissions held in Moscow. As such, party members visiting the Russian capital were debriefed and information was factored into the Comintern surveillance system. Similarly, a number of British and New Zealand communists were stationed in Moscow, working for the Comintern to compile information, assess party activity and supervise contact between the 'centre and periphery'. Both parties then received instructions that, on the basis of information gathered and the Comintern's interpretation of the 'international situation', outlined their objectives and the theoretical paradigm in which to act.⁸ Given this, Trapeznik concludes that the 'tasks set down by the Comintern and its instructions provide clear evidence of its control'.⁹ Moreover, he suggests that 'Comintern monitoring and direction also came in the form of envoys, the infamous "Agents from Moscow"'.¹⁰

There are, however, problems with such an argument. Despite a direct statement to this end, there is no evidence to prove that an 'agent' was ever sent from Moscow to New Zealand or that one came with a Comintern brief from another country. Certainly, to our knowledge, the Comintern archives reveal no such detail, despite the sometimes desperate pleas of the CPNZ to receive a visit. Trapeznik treats requests for an instructor as evidence that an 'agent' was sent. He also argues that the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) performed the role of 'agent of Moscow' in relation to the CPNZ. This suggestion again betrays a lack of understanding of what actually occurred during the period under question. Despite the assertion to the contrary, the CPA showed little if any interest in the CPNZ between 1930 and 1936, the period where one would assume Stalinist control was most acute. There was, in fact, less CPA influence in New Zealand during the six years after the CPNZ joined the Comintern in 1928 than in the years before it.¹¹ Rather than trying to shake off an external yoke, in many

instances the CPNZ wanted to be more directly influenced by the Comintern. Too often they felt their views were simply ignored both in Moscow and Sydney.¹²

The CPGB experience was somewhat different. Soviet and Comintern representatives – most famously Maxim Litvinov, Mikhail Borodin and Max Goldfarb (better known as Petrovsky) – were stationed in Britain from 1918, Soviet economic and diplomatic institutions employed numerous British communists in the interwar period (through which some Soviet-CPGB relations were conducted) and the party received regular visits from foreign party members acting under the Comintern's jurisdiction. So, for example, the KPD's Josef Lenz and Walter Ulbricht attended, advised and reported on the two CPGB conferences of 1929 at which the 'class against class' line was formally implemented alongside a new panel system for 'electing' the party leadership.¹³ Undoubtedly, their presence and interventions helped shape the political, organizational and ideological trajectory of the CPGB. And yet there are problems with relating such influence to the concept of 'Stalinization'. Most obviously, Moscow's 'agents' were most conspicuous – and their presence most sustained – prior to Stalin's wresting domination of the Soviet party and Comintern in 1928–29. Petrovsky (who was also representative to the French party) was relieved of responsibility for the CPGB in 1929, and no permanent Comintern envoy was appointed to the CPGB thereafter. Thus, while Comintern émigrés could and did function as a lever of control, such a role was not peculiarly 'Stalinist'. Indeed, while Comintern and Soviet delegates continued to visit Britain and report on the CPGB over the 1930s, their influence on day-to-day party affairs actually became less acute than in the previous decade.¹⁴ Rather, such responsibility fell – ostensibly – to those ILS graduates returning from Moscow trained in the arts of 'Leninist' organization, and onto a wider leadership cadre vetted between 1928 and 1931 for their loyalty to the dominant 'Stalinist' faction inside the Soviet party.

Here again, however, we may question the uniformity, effectiveness and extent of such a form of control. Most obviously, in the New Zealand case, fewer than half-a-dozen CPNZ members attended the ILS, while some of those who did enrol, for example Nellie Scott, made almost no impact on party life on their return. In Scott's case, there had been hopes that she would be the driving force behind a vibrant women's department, but she proved unable to rise to the challenge and the task fell briefly to a male comrade before 'the woman question' dropped off the agenda entirely for a few years.¹⁵ Other attendees, such

as Fred Freeman, did play a central role in the party leadership. Freeman spent about four years in Moscow, returning to New Zealand in 1934. However, despite being thoroughly imbued in the culture of the Comintern, Freeman's case serves to undermine any suggestion that ILS students simply acted as couriers of Stalinist authority. That he was a controlling figure is without question; yet so too is that fact that he was a law unto himself. His period of leadership served to take the party on a sectarian political trajectory against, rather than in line with, the prevailing perspectives emanating from Moscow.¹⁶

In Britain, there was a more sustained effort to provide a revolutionary elite trained in Bolshevism, loyal to the Soviet Union, and able to ensure that the CPGB acted in accord with the objectives set by Moscow. At least 160 British communists attended the ILS between 1926 and 1937, undertaking an array of courses in theory, history and political economics, with some even receiving military assignments and instruction in covert activity.¹⁷ The ILS, therefore, was perhaps the most rigorous example of the Comintern's attempt to shape the CPGB in a Soviet mould, with its emphasis on discipline and clandestinity conforming to the model of transplanted Stalinist control.

Yet, the practical impact of the ILS proved far more ambiguous than its objectives, as Cohen and Morgan have demonstrated. First, its flowering was relatively brief, with recruitment, 'graduation' and appointment peaking at the height of Stalin's assertion of authority over the international movement between 1929 and 1932. Over the 1930s, the party evidently gave less prominence to the ILS; its graduate cadre exerted a diminishing influence and conformed less readily to the more convivial policies of the popular front. By the 1940s, the ILS contingent was largely absent from a party leadership that nevertheless retained foundation members of the CPGB and non-ILS recruits from the 1930s. Second, the CPGB found it difficult (and failed) to fill its student quotas, partly because of its low membership but also, it seems, because of a lack of political will. Certainly, Harry Pollitt was warned to take recruitment to the ILS 'more seriously' in 1934, and the party was later accused of using the elite school as a 'dumping ground' for troublesome or less able members. Third, moreover, the aptitude of the students sent and the net results of their Moscow training were not uniformly conducive to effective Bolshevization (or Stalinization).¹⁸ As Thorpe has noted, 'many former students disappeared from within the party before too long. Others reverted to type and became loyal followers of the national party leadership, or else were sidelined by it'.¹⁹ While Peter Kerrigan could be labelled 'the most Stalinist of Stalinists', his accuser, fellow ILS graduate

Harry Wicks, soon went on to become a Trotskyist.²⁰ Finally, the standing of the ILS students within the party should not be taken for granted. To take a single example, the Lenin students posted to Yorkshire during the textile dispute of 1930 reported that they were 'not welcomed' by members in the region.²¹ While we should not underestimate the ILS – its graduates did provide a core of CPGB leaders and organizers – the school was, in Cohen and Morgan's words, 'a site of tacit conflict as well as collusion between the CPGB and the International'. Taken generally, ILS graduates were 'no more likely to be advanced to leadership positions than other party activists meeting the same criteria'.²²

Very clearly, the Comintern's 'supervision, surveillance and monitoring' of the CPGB stood in contrast to the New Zealand example. Even so, such attention ebbed and flowed depending on the objectives of the Soviet leadership and the prevailing Comintern line. At a practical level, the AAS – with a full-time staff of 12 in 1932 – was simply not equipped to give equal and sustained attention to all the parties under its jurisdiction.²³ For this reason, Comintern authority relied on an interchange of personnel between the respective national party and Moscow. As such, senior British figures posted to Moscow could – as in the case of Jack Murphy and Robin Page Arnot in the mid-1920s – become the dogged advocates of strict Comintern policy and overt critics of their British comrades.²⁴ Yet this did not always earn them kudos or mean that their views thereby became the accepted 'line' of the CPGB. Jack Murphy certainly won himself few friends during his time in Moscow, returning to become an increasingly isolated figure within the leadership. He was expelled in 1932.²⁵ For others, such as Johnny Campbell, a brief sojourn in Moscow provided opportunity to assert their own particular interpretation of the Comintern line. Certainly, Campbell played his part in moderating the CPGB's trade union policy in 1930, though he was careful not to push this too far on his return to Britain.²⁶

At a practical level, the extent of Comintern control must likewise be qualified; the notion that the CPNZ and the CPGB fit simply into a 'totalitarian' paradigm breaks down as soon as the focus shifts from the organizational hierarchy to party activity 'on the ground' and individual membership. It fails to explain just how people were attracted to communism, to account for those who joined the party for a limited (and not necessarily short) period of time, and how their communism intertwined with their wider lives and identities as workers, trade unionists, intellectuals, fathers, mothers and so on. Certainly, the ambiguity noted in the early 1920s by Ruth Fischer with regard the

relationship between the CPGB and the Labour Party continued beyond Stalin's rise to power.²⁷ Speaking of the 1930s, a Labour activist could recall that 'Labour Party people and the Communist Party people locally were working together, co-operating on local problems, local issues. In fact, very often one didn't know which of the two parties the people one knew belonged to ... People weren't deterred by rules ... we worked together.'²⁸ In similar fashion, Will Paynter – communist and later National Union of Mineworkers' general secretary – could concur with the observation that he was 'a miner and trade unionist first and a communist second', something he claimed was also true of Arthur Horner and 'most leaders who have lived and worked in the mining valleys of South Wales'. This, he insisted, was necessary to retain the respect of the union members, and remained the case even when the two positions – communist and trade union official – did not coincide. Summing up neatly the tensions that could cut across the communist party, Paynter continued that 'the point is that the communist with [trade union] responsibilities will think and react to situations in a somewhat different way from the communist without which can result in opposing stands being taken in given situations'.²⁹

Communists undoubtedly drew inspiration from the Bolshevik Revolution and the building of the Soviet Union, and – over time – they internalized many of the methods, codes, language and conventions of Soviet communism.³⁰ But such a relationship was never wholly fixed; it shifted over time at different levels within the respective party, and always had to be filtered through the social-cultural and political circumstances in which party members were active. Put bluntly, the composition, priorities and approach of communist party branches in, say, South Wales and Stepney differed from each other, just as they did in Otago and Wellington.³¹ Generational differentials, too, ensured that people joined the party in different years, experienced political events and approached communism at different times of their lives, and brought with them different preconceptions, expectations and relationships to the party.³² More generally, both the CPNZ and the CPGB were too small to have become 'total' institutions; their memberships were relatively dispersed and acted within a legal and voluntarist context. In short, both parties were continually defined by – and largely depended on – their interactivity with the mainstream labour movement and the wider working-class community.³³

Finally, the concept of a party wholly subordinate to a top-down chain of hierarchal command once more ignores a tension that lay at the heart of the communist experience: namely, that between the

member as a conduit for party policy and their role as an active participant in the class struggle. Both the CPNZ and CPGB depended on their members to take the initiative and to interact within the working-class communities, workplaces and organizations in which they lived. In such a way, Morgan, Cohen and Flinn can point to individual communist activity amidst the unemployed, on housing and other social issues to provide the 'most distinctive contributions' made by party members to their 'manifold local histories'.³⁴ So, for example, it was integral to Ernie Benson's identity as a communist that his fellow unemployed workers in Leeds turned to him to articulate their dissatisfaction with the 'test work' they were made to do in the 1930s, just as it was for him to set about 'smash[ing] this scab making and soul destroying scheme'. To this end, Benson did his communist duty in explaining to his fellow workers the ills of capitalism whilst taking the lead in organizing resistance to it.³⁵ Similarly, in the same city, the party adapted its strategies to the needs of the time, rallying its members to organize support for working-class families challenged by the means test. On at least one occasion, communist Red Wheelers cycled around the community to recruit volunteers to prevent the bailiffs making entry into the house of a beleaguered worker's family.³⁶ Likewise, in New Zealand, comparable processes were at work. In Auckland, for example, the anti-eviction activity initiated by unemployed communists in the inner-city suburbs of Newton and Freeman Bay was driven by their roots in the community rather than any grand design from above.³⁷ In other words, communists necessarily acted on their own initiative and within a broader social milieu than any Stalinization thesis would seem to allow.

Provision of propaganda material

According to Trapeznik, the Comintern also 'exercised "control" through the provision of propaganda material to the CPNZ'.³⁸ Unquestionably, a considerable body of literature was derived from overseas and keenly devoured by CPNZ members. This material included newspapers and journals of the CPGB, CPA, CPUSA, as well as Comintern publications such as *Inprecorr*. Yet, in a New Zealand context, a reliance on overseas literature was not a characteristic peculiar to the CPNZ. New Zealand could well be described as a derivative culture, and works published overseas had long dominated the country's cultural and political life.³⁹ The reliance of the CPNZ on overseas material was no more evidence of outside control than it was for earlier New Zealand socialists who keenly awaited the latest issue of *Clarion* or the *Labour*

Leader. Even if it was, Trapeznik ignores the fact that the CPNZ relied less and less on external literature. The irony is that the CPNZ's first weekly newspaper and New Zealand-based journal were first established in 1933, at the height of the third period and the very time when the CPNZ was considered to have been under closest Comintern control. The party was still a keen consumer of overseas literature, especially the CPGB-aligned *Labour Monthly*, but the case for this as a mechanism of Comintern control is weak. Indeed, socialist movements committed to internationalism had always engaged in a transnational exchange of ideas, and there was nothing peculiarly Stalinist – or even Marxist – about such a process.

In the British case, the CPGB – as with all member parties of the Comintern – was required on condition of entry into the Comintern to ensure that its 'leading press' printed 'all the important official documents of the Executive Committee of the Communist International'.⁴⁰ To this end, British party publications were from the outset home to Soviet and ECCI declarations, and the party's veneration of the Soviet Union was openly apparent. Once Stalin rose to dominance within the Soviet party, moreover, the CPGB obediently published and endorsed the theories, policies and achievements of the Soviet leadership, including the terror and the infamous Nazi-Soviet pact. Again, however, the extent to which such a practice equates to Stalinist control may be tempered by the fact that such a 'mechanism' pre-dated Stalin's rise to power, and by the shift from the tight strictures of 'class against class' to the necessarily more inclusive politics of the popular front. By the mid-1930s, the party and its press were seeking to highlight, exploit and extend its links within the wider labour movement by adapting to the prevailing cultures of the left.

Similarly, as with New Zealand, it is difficult to see how such a process was overtly 'controlling'. Clearly, the intention was to lay down the prevailing ECCI line in order that the membership should absorb and propagate it, but there always remained the possibility of divergent interpretation or misunderstanding. To what extent, moreover, did such propaganda 'control' those who sympathized with but did not join the party? The CPGB's propaganda output was far wider than that prescribed by the Comintern, and celebration of the Soviet Union and Stalin formed but a part of communist literature. Indeed, it has recently been suggested that the CPGB's reverence for Stalin differed in key ways from the party's continental equivalents, being as lavish but simultaneously more restrained.⁴¹ To delineate the publication of Soviet and Comintern propaganda as a means of control is to

ignore the voluntarist nature of communist membership in New Zealand and Britain, while also disregarding the complex interplay of political, personal and psychological factors that bound party members to the Soviet Union and the international movement.

Directly influencing the leadership

Trapeznik's third mechanism for Comintern control was, by various means, directly influencing the leadership. This, he argues, took the form of encouraging factions opposed to the leadership, and by 'mentoring those whom it deemed potential party leaders, or by chastising those who displeased it'.⁴² Of course, both the Soviet party and the ECCI did act in such a way, with the KPD's history providing a most glaring example. Despite the ban on factions imposed by Lenin at the tenth Soviet party congress in 1921 being transferred to the Comintern amidst the fallout from the KPD's failed 'March Action', it was through a combination of exploiting (or forcing) division and utilizing the ECCI's constitutional authority that the balance of power shifted within the communist movement. This, in turn, paved the way for Stalin and his associates to emerge victorious by the late 1920s. But was such a process uniformly implemented, and did it always ensure 'total' control?

Typically, Trapeznik provides no example or evidence of the Comintern directly intervening to construct or exploit factionalism within the CPNZ leadership. There is certainly evidence that both sides in a particular dispute within the party leadership could try to use their contacts in the Comintern to bolster their position, but this is not new information nor, more crucially, is it evidence of Comintern control.⁴³ Closer scrutiny of the CPNZ leadership during the period in which it was a Comintern affiliate suggests a relative lack of external influence. Dick Griffin, party secretary from the CPNZ's affiliation in 1928 until about 1933, was selected without involvement of either the Comintern or CPA. His successor, Fred Freeman, was a product of the ILS who liked Moscow so much that he tried his best to avoid returning to New Zealand. When he did finally return in early 1934 it was after repeated requests by the CPNZ itself rather than as the result of the Comintern installing their chosen one. By assuming the leadership, Freeman had in fact defied a Comintern instruction that he should not take a leadership position for a few years after his return. Freeman's successor, Leo Sim, was also chosen without direct Comintern instruction. He had been in Moscow for the Comintern's seventh world congress (1935) and, on his return, acted as a champion of the popular front. However, this was not something imposed on an unwilling party membership.

Sim returned to a party in open revolt against Freeman's uncompromisingly sectarian leadership. Freeman, meanwhile, remained a dominant force in the party leadership via his new role of organizational secretary, and remained singularly unwilling to embrace the less militant line. He ultimately had to be expelled from the party, a development that did involve the assistance of the CPA in the form of Lance Sharkey, but not as Trapeznik implies, as an 'agent of control', that is to say an unwanted or imposed external intervention. Sharkey was acting with the support of the CPNZ's leadership, including by this time Freeman's own wife, and in line with the dominant sentiment of the party as a whole.⁴⁴

To suggest that Sim did not thrive in his role as general secretary would be an understatement, and by 1937 the issue of leadership was again seriously in question. Having been burnt by the power of a single dominant figure, in the form of Freeman, the party was not keen on embracing another. Nor were they interested in developing the kind of personality cult so often portrayed as a characteristic of a Stalinized party. From 1938 until 1949, the CPNZ did away with the position of general secretary and operated a more collective leadership. If the Comintern objected to this and exercised control in the manner that is suggested, then this practice would have been quickly overridden. There were obvious candidates that the Comintern could have imposed should this have been its method, most obviously Gordon Watson, editor of the *Worker's Weekly*, who had spent most of 1937 in Moscow.⁴⁵

Relative to the CPNZ, the CPGB experienced far more obvious and extensive Comintern interference in its leadership. From the earliest days, the party's delegates to Moscow were briefed, consulted, persuaded and – as Pollitt discovered in late 1927, when he received a 'hammering ... which lasted eight hours'⁴⁶ – cajoled into accepting the line of the ECCI. As Thorpe has shown, the ECCI in 1920 threatened to switch its support to Sylvia Pankhurst's Communist Party (British Section of the Communist International) if the existing CPGB failed to act in accord with its directives, and inter-party disputes were regularly settled within the Comintern.⁴⁷ Evidently, too, party leaders such as Dutt, Pollitt, Murphy, Stewart, Springhall and others forged links within the Comintern that shaped their respective 'careers'.⁴⁸ The reorganization of the party in 1922–23, which in many ways pre-empted the Bolshevization of the Comintern from 1924, was implemented with ECCI patronage. That said, the CPGB was hardly subject to incessant leadership purges or realignment; by contrast, it was renowned for the paucity of its 'factionalism' and its continuity of leadership.⁴⁹

In terms of Stalinization, the change of line in 1928–29 was undoubtedly facilitated by Comintern pressure and bias towards a section of the CPGB leadership.⁵⁰ Similarly, Harry Pollitt's appointment as general secretary was ratified at a meeting with the Russian delegation at the tenth ECCI plenum in July 1929, after a series of meetings in Britain and Berlin had proposed and rejected an array of leadership possibilities.⁵¹ But did such intervention bring with it complete control? As is now well known, Pollitt could test the patience of some within the Comintern; his appointment occurred amidst much left-wing criticism of his trade union policy from within sections of the CPGB, Comintern and Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). Indeed, Pollitt actively resisted the formation of at least two 'red' trade unions during the sectarian third period, ignoring RILU directives and arguing creatively to reassert a more inclusive trade union policy in the process.⁵² By 1932, Pollitt was well aware of 'a definite campaign against me at RILU headquarters'.⁵³ As this suggests, a close look at his political career reveals Pollitt to be far more than a simple product of Stalinist manoeuvring projected onto the British stage. Pollitt, after all, was a man with notable links to the wider British labour movement and a conception of class struggle and revolution drawn from his own family and working experiences. Famously, too, Pollitt resigned his position as general secretary following the CPGB's enforced adoption of the 'imperialist war' line in 1939. As such, Pollitt was unequivocally loyal to the Soviet Union, its leadership and to the 'line' laid down by the Comintern, but he also demonstrated a degree of critical judgement and even proved adept at moving within such relative confines, particularly once the stringencies of 'class against class' began to transform into the more inclusive politics of the united and popular front.⁵⁴

Financial aid

The last of Trapeznik's mechanisms for control is the classic 'Moscow gold', long held by critics of communism as the smoking gun of corruption.⁵⁵ There can be no disputing the fact that funds were sent by the Comintern to the CPNZ for a range of purposes, including travel, to assist with debt related to a printing press and, on occasion, for the physical sustenance of individuals. Yet, the infrequency and very limited scale of payments suggests that the capacity of finance to play a determining role on the CPNZ was very limited indeed. There is far more evidence of the CPNZ leadership naively requesting significant sums of money from the Comintern than of the requests being answered in the affirmative.⁵⁶ The New Zealand party leadership did not live a comfortable, Moscow-provided existence; in fact, most lived closer to the bread-

line than a life of luxury.⁵⁷ Nor did external funds allow the party to employ a bloated clique of technocrats ruling a party with an iron hand. Most New Zealand communists were literally 'professional revolutionaries without pay'.⁵⁸

The CPGB received far more generous funding from the Comintern than the CPNZ, although its impact and influence has often been misinterpreted and exaggerated. Large funds (£55,000) were granted to establish the party, and regular – if uneven – subsidies were issued thereafter. These enabled the party to buy premises in the heart of London (to the consternation of N. K. Kliskho, a Cheka member and part of the Soviet trade delegation in England, who expected the money to be spent on more clandestine activity), and to help finance the publication of an array of periodicals and papers, including the *Daily Worker* in 1930.⁵⁹ Although the Comintern appears to have decided by 1932 to 'throw all the parties more and more on their own resources',⁶⁰ the CPGB would not have been able to sustain its organization and levels of activity without Moscow's financial aid.

In terms of Stalinization or the CPGB's total subordination to the Comintern, however, the relationship between money and 'control' is less clear-cut. As Kevin Morgan has recently demonstrated, the financial relationship between the CPGB and Moscow was forever fraught with tensions and ambiguities. More practically, there was actually a reduction in the CPGB's subsidies in the wake of Stalin's gaining domination of the Comintern, along with a fall in the proportion of the party income arriving from Moscow.⁶¹ In any case, the CPGB was left to decide how and where its budget was spent, to set its own estimates and to negotiate with an International Control Commission that rarely delivered the monies requested by the British comrades. Equally, as a Marxist organization, the CPGB – like the CPNZ – did not regard its receiving financial assistance from Moscow as placing it in the service of the Soviet Union *per se*. Rather, material assistance was perceived, as everything else, in class terms and thereby transcending simple 'national' relationships.⁶² This is not to downplay the extent to which the CPGB was dependent on the Soviet regime for its financial solvency, but to understand that such correlation could be understood in an increasingly complex if still suitably internationalist (Marxist) manner.

Conclusion

A comparative study of the New Zealand and British communist parties helps reveal some of the nuances, variations and distinctions that existed beneath the ostensibly monolithic communist umbrella. These, in part,

may be explained by the two parties' affiliating to the Comintern at different times. For the CPNZ, it has been commonly assumed that joining the Comintern in 1928 – just as Stalinist dynamics came to domination in Moscow – catapulted the tiny party down a barren path of Stalin-inspired sectarianism. Given this, one could expect the New Zealand party to have been even more thoroughly 'Stalinized' than its British counterpart. Yet, this does not appear to be the case. As the above analysis has demonstrated, the timing and extent to which the CPNZ followed a generalized pattern of Stalinization can be severally questioned. Local determinants and contexts made the New Zealand experience less predictable than that of some other parties. So too did the sheer logistical issues of running a tightly centralized Comintern across several continents and oceans. Equally, a country dismissed by the Comintern hierarchy as a paradise of the Second International was never going to be prioritized.⁶³

The CPGB, meanwhile, formed and joined the Comintern within eighteen months of the International's inauguration and was amongst the first to willingly overhaul its organizational model along explicitly Bolshevik lines. Its history was very much defined by its membership of a Comintern that evolved through the ages of both Lenin and Stalin. This in turn may help explain the closer relationship experienced by the CPGB with regard the Comintern, although Britain's relative importance within Moscow's global schema and the party's closer proximity to the heartland of communism were arguably of far greater consequence. That said, as noted above, there were evident tensions, limits and incongruities within this relationship, and a comparative study of the CPGB with, say, the German, Italian or Polish party would no doubt reveal further variations in the communist experience and any process of Stalinization. Put bluntly, determinants broader than either Russia or Stalin must be considered if we are to understand communist history and experience. In Britain, as elsewhere, the geographical, social, political, cultural and economic context in which the party and its members functioned must be acknowledged and incorporated into any valid assessment of communism's character, impact and development.

The Comintern was unable to act in perfect symmetry, as an array of indigenous and extraneous factors served to obstruct, redirect and hinder the implementation of a supposedly scientifically reasoned theory and policy. However much Stalin, the Soviet leadership and the Comintern endeavoured to control the activities of the international communist movement, geography, context and a mix of human voli-

tion and interpretation hampered even the most centralized chain of command. Where, at one level, the parties acted within an accepted theoretical paradigm forged in Moscow and endeavoured to carry out related policies as instructed by a Comintern increasingly subordinate to the Soviet hierarchy, on another, the processes by and contexts in which such theory and practice were accepted, interpreted and acted upon meant that communist parties and members shared different as well as similar experiences over the 1920s and 1930s.

As problematically, the various levers of control accredited to the process of Stalinization were often forged prior to Stalin's consolidation of power within the Soviet and international communist movement. And while it would be wrong to assert that Stalinism was an inevitable consequence of Bolshevism, the relationship between the two needs to be acknowledged and unpicked if we are to gain a more precise understanding of a complex and shifting political phenomenon. Not dissimilarly, the years in which Stalin finally sealed his authority over the Comintern (1928–31) did not mark an 'end' in communist politics: the relationship between the Soviet Union, the Comintern and the various national parties continued to shift and realign over the 1930s and beyond. At best, therefore, Stalinization describes the moment at which Stalin overcame his last serious challenge within the Soviet Union and transferred his authority across the Comintern. This, however, took time and occurred unevenly. Ultimately, new members, new policies, new problems and new priorities ensured that 'total' control remained a chimera.

Notes

- 1 K. Morgan, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold. Bolshevism and the British Left* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006); K. Taylor, 'The Communist Party of New Zealand and the Third Period', in M. Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); A. Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); M. Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain between the Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).
- 2 K. Morgan, G. Cohen and A. Flinn, *Communists and British Society, 1920–91* (London: Rivers Oram, 2005); K. Taylor, 'Kiwi Comrades: The Social Basis of New Zealand Communism', in K. Morgan, G. Cohen and A. Flynn (eds), *Agents of the Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005).
- 3 A. Trapeznik, '"Grandfather, Parents and Little Brother": A Study of Centre–Periphery Relations', in A. Trapeznik and A. Fox (eds.), *Lenin's Legacy Down*

- Under: New Zealand's Cold War* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2004), pp. 71–2.
- 4 K. Taylor, 'Kiwi Comrades', pp. 265–87; K. Taylor, '"Potential Allies of the Working Class": The Communist Party of New Zealand and Maori', in P. Moloney and K. Taylor (eds.), *On the Left: Essays on New Zealand Socialism* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2002), pp. 103–15.
 - 5 Subsequent changes saw the political systems diverge: for example, a move in 1951 to a unicameral system; in the 1990s, to proportional representation; and, from the 1980s, the incorporation of an indigenous dynamic in New Zealand politics and law, Treaty of Waitangi. See R. Miller (ed.), *New Zealand Government and Politics* (Auckland: Oxford University Press New Zealand, 2003).
 - 6 There is no single volume history of the CPNZ. For the most comprehensive account, see K. Taylor, 'Worker Vanguard or People's Voice? The Communist Party of New Zealand from Origins to 1946', Victoria University of Wellington PhD thesis, 1994. For the CPGB, see Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*.
 - 7 See Taylor, 'Kiwi Comrades', pp. 280–1.
 - 8 For a more extensive discussion of themes raised in this chapter, see A. Thorpe, 'Comintern "Control" of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920–43', *English Historical Review*, 452 (1998), 637–62.
 - 9 Trapeznik, 'Grandfather', p. 65.
 - 10 Ibid.
 - 11 He incorrectly states that two CPA members were sent to New Zealand after a 1930 CPNZ request for assistance. In fact, the two men had come to New Zealand the year before. While they played an important role in the CPNZ, there is no evidence that their presence was at the behest of the Comintern.
 - 12 See Taylor, 'The Communist Party', p. 273.
 - 13 National Museum of Labour History [NMLH], CPGB Political Bureau Minutes, 12 June, 12 and 24 August 1929; Meeting of the ECCI Political Secretariat, 1 and 11 July 1929; CPGB Central Committee Minutes, 15–16 June, 7–11 August and 29 October 1929; Memorandum from Rajani Palme Dutt to the Central Committee, 20 October 1929.
 - 14 Morgan, Cohen and Flinn, *Communists*, pp. 210–29; Thorpe, 'Comintern "Control"', 648.
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- 33 Morgan, Cohen and Flinn, *Communists*, p. 5; Taylor, 'Worker Vanguard or People's Voice?'
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- 39 For a recent discussion of the centrality of overseas publications in New Zealand, see T. Beaglehole, *A Life of J. C. Beaglehole: New Zealand Scholar* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006).
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13

From Bolshevism to Stalinism: Communism and the Comintern in Ireland

Emmet O'Connor

Ireland between the wars was one of the European countries in which communism never established a substantial presence. Nevertheless, Ireland acquired some importance in Communist International (Comintern) thinking from the potential of its national question to foment revolution at home, embarrass Britain and encourage unrest in the empire.¹ It would be a troublesome outpost for Moscow, in which ideological issues were frequently overshadowed by problems of organization. Relations with the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) revolved around three themes: logistical support, policy application and control, and tactics towards republicans and the Irish Republican Army (IRA). There were several, sequential communist organizations during these years. After ineffectual Bolshevization of the first Communist Party of Ireland (CPI, 1921–24), the ECCI conferred its imprimatur on Jim Larkin's Irish Worker League (IWL, 1924–29), but suffered acute difficulty in collaborating with Big Jim. The IWL's successor, the Revolutionary Workers' Groups (RWG, 1930–33), was Bolshevized from the outset, and prepared the ground for the second CPI (1933–41). Throughout this period, the ECCI tried to give the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) a 'fostering' role in Ireland. The role was rejected by the CPI up to 1923, and by Larkin, but accepted by the Irish in 1934. What was seen as the poor performance of the CPI from 1934 would cause Moscow to rely increasingly on the CPGB to supervise Irish affairs.

Reconsideration of Bolshevization and Stalinization is timely in the context of Irish historiography. Prior to the liberalization of access to the Comintern archives, the limited literature in the field saw the concepts telescoped, and 'Stalinism' employed loosely by non-party historians. With more plausibility than evidence, they presented their

subject as an indigenous movement which turned innocently to Russia for help, only to be handicapped by confounded orders from afar. The central thesis of Milotte's *Communism in Modern Ireland*, the sole general history up to 2004, was that 'entanglement with Stalinist Russia and [the] constant need to reflect the foreign policy requirements of the Soviet state' left communism 'unable to develop or sustain anything even approaching a consistent analysis of Irish society'.² For Bowler, the Irish were 'mostly ill-served by their political masters in the Comintern', while Anderson deplored the 'often poorly researched and consequently misguided directions of the Comintern'.³ At the same time, Bowler and Jackson argued that Irish communists were primarily Irish revolutionaries, rather than 'pawns' of Moscow.⁴ By contrast, party historians treated centre-periphery ties as unproblematic, and party members rejected 'Stalinism' as inappropriate. One veteran wrote, in a rejoinder to Bowler's description of Seán Murray's leadership as 'the pursuit of Stalinism', '[the] term "Stalinist" is intended to be disparaging and Murray would not have so classified himself. During his years as a communist it was not a term used within the movement'.⁵

With their 4,000 pages of manuscripts on Ireland, the Comintern archives make it possible to establish a clear picture of Irish relations with the ECCI. They corroborate presumptions of Moscow dominance, but also reveal that the form of the relationship varied, and suggest that a distinction should be made between Bolshevization – subordination to Moscow – and Stalinization – the association of the party primarily, substantially and unreservedly with the USSR. Before the 'third period', Bolshevization aimed to bring party policy into line. During the third period, it entailed the management of the party from the centre and the creation of a Bolshevized membership. Stalinism developed after the seventh world congress. As used here, the concept implies a condition more abject than that described by Weber. What is meant is that the post-1935 CPI became, in effect, a vicarious party, whose *raison d'être* was support for the Soviet Union rather than revolution at home.

The race for Moscow

The Irish connection with communism from 1919 to 1943 was broader than the communists themselves; less of a thin red thread than a pyramid, with a wide base tapering over 20 years to the pinnacle of insignificance. The Bolsheviks were very popular in Ireland in the imme-

diate aftermath of the October Revolution, more perhaps for their opposition to the Great War and support for national self-determination than anything else. Lenin had welcomed the Easter Rising of 1916, and during the War of Independence, representatives of the Irish Republic in the United States discussed a recognition treaty with agents of the Soviet Russian government. Éamon de Valera later despatched an emissary to Moscow to secure recognition and weapons. One of the first initiatives of the provisional government that oversaw the transition from the Republic to the Irish Free State was to have an official meet the Soviet trade attaché in London.⁶ Not surprisingly, the Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, and especially the radical circle within it in the Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI), were more substantially pro-Bolshevik.⁷ The flirtation with revolutionism did not last long. Labour distanced itself from the Comintern in 1920, and lost its enthusiasm for the Bolshevik regime in 1922.

While the Communist International had made a few statements on the Irish national struggle in 1919–20, it was the second world congress that marked the real beginning of Comintern policy on Ireland. In the months preceding the congress, three factions had sought affiliation to the Comintern. The biggest of these was the SPI, with about 150 members. However, it was compromised by its lacklustre record of agitation and its association with reformists. The second faction was the Communist Labour Party, led by Seán McLoughlin. The winners in this race for Moscow were the Irish Communist Groups, led by Roddy Connolly (the 19-year-old son of James) and Éadhmonn MacAlpine. Both attended the second world congress and misled the ECCI into thinking that they had influence in the Citizen Army, the workers' militia which James Connolly had led into the Easter Rising, and which had since lain dormant. The Irish had gone to the congress with proposals for building a conventional political party, but found the Comintern more interested in exploiting the opportunities offered by the independence struggle.⁸ They returned home with a promise of financial aid to help them form a party and revitalize the Citizen Army. However, the money failed to arrive and the Citizen Army failed to respond. They had also been given a document saying that the ECCI 'has decided to assist by all means in its power the National Revolutionary movement in Ireland', and that Connolly and MacAlpine were its agents. Dáil Éireann gave them a hearing, but said it would deal only with the Soviet government.⁹ Unfortunately for Connolly, Soviet government representatives took a complimentary view, and Ireland offers an example of the contrasting agendas of the

ECCI and Narkomindel during these years, as the latter pursued its own contacts with Sinn Féin and the very people in the Labour Party that Connolly was denouncing as 'sham socialists'.

In September 1921, Connolly's supporters won control of the SPI, expelled the reformists and secured affiliation to the Comintern, meeting its 21 conditions, as the CPI. Despite his enthusiasm for the link with Moscow and an almost filial devotion to Lenin, Connolly pursued his own line. He deemed the party too small to build an industrial base or influence the labour unrest that rattled the economy during the slump of 1921–23. Whereas 225,000 workers – over 25 per cent of the waged labour force – were affiliated to the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, the CPI had just 120 members, the bulk in Dublin. Hopes of organizing in the North never materialized. Connolly's strategy was to exploit the split in the national movement over the Anglo-Irish treaty of December 1921, which partitioned Ireland and made the Free State a dominion of the British Empire. He expected that anti-treatyites would resort to the traditional republican fallback position of turning to 'the men of no property'. Appeals to the IRA were fruitless until August 1922. Civil war had broken out in June and, as republicans suffered relentless reverses, the IRA's Dublin-based second in command, Ernie O'Malley, came to the conclusion that they needed to enlist the support of the working class to stay in the fight. Following a meeting between Connolly and Mikhail Borodin, the Comintern's emissary in Britain, Borodin sent his secretary J. T. Murphy and Arthur MacManus, chairman of the CPGB, to Dublin. Murphy claimed they met 'two of the chiefs of staff of the IRA', and signed an agreement providing that the IRA would set up a political department with a socialist programme, and the ECCI would assist with the supply of arms.¹⁰ The 22 August found Connolly in Berlin to arrange an arms ship and cabling Moscow for funds.¹¹ At this point, the paper trail peters out, and it is likely that the ECCI did not wish to say 'yea or nay' to a request for arms from the IRA. Republican sources say nothing on the deal. O'Malley may well have wanted to conceal it from his chief of staff, Liam Lynch, who was hostile to any shift from military to political struggle. By the end of the year, Connolly had nothing to show for his tactics, and the IRA's military position was patently desperate.

In the first application of Bolshevization to Ireland, the Comintern's fourth world congress brought the CPI back in step. The two Irish delegates were reprimanded for neglecting class struggle and, in conformity with the theses of the congress, directed to pursue 'dual tasks', agitating on the national and the class questions.¹² Comintern control was

reinforced by bringing the CPI under the fosterage of the CPGB, whereas formerly it had answered to Moscow through Berlin. The influence of Scots in CPI affairs in 1923 would cause Dublin wags to joke about the 'Communist Party of Scotland'. Whether a coincidental reflection of their prominence in the CPGB and old connections with the Irish left, or from a belief that the Irish would find dictation easier from a Celtic cousin than a Saxon, the use of Scots as advisers or agents would be characteristic of Comintern management of Ireland. The new ECCI direction, or 'the turn to class' as it was understood in the CPI, was welcomed by party critics of Connolly's headstrong leadership, and seen as more in keeping with communism. Connolly was the only dissident at a congress in February 1923, where the CPGB's Tom Bell outlined an ECCI directive. There followed a brief organizational growth but, by the autumn, the party was in decline, internally divided and limping along on an ECCI subvention of £75 a quarter. Moscow requested the CPGB to investigate. MacManus compiled a damning report on the party membership, which he deemed to be too republican and scarcely Leninist.¹³ Against stout protests, and on the advice of the British, the CPI was dissolved in January 1924.

The un-Bolshevizable Big Jim

One reason why the CPGB and the ECCI were sanguine about liquidating the CPI was that they had an alternative, waiting impatiently in the wings. Larkin had made his mark as one of the world's great labour agitators during the lock-out in Dublin in 1913, earning Lenin's approbation as 'a remarkable speaker and a man of seething energy [who] has performed miracles among the unskilled workers'.¹⁴ In 1914, Larkin moved to the United States as a freelance agitator, became active in the project to transform the Socialist Party of America into a communist party and, in 1920, was imprisoned in New York for 'criminal anarchy'. Released in 1923, he returned to Dublin, where he launched the IWL as an auxiliary to his paper, the *Irish Worker*. He encouraged the CPGB to have the CPI dissolved, making it very plain that Moscow would have to deal directly with himself. Neither the British nor the Soviets were surprised at this insistence.¹⁵ Big Jim was notoriously domineering, jealous, sensitive to criticism and undisciplined. The CPGB and the ECCI knew that collaborating with him would be difficult; they did not realize that it would be impossible.

Larkin visited Moscow for the fifth world congress of the Comintern and the third congress of the Red International of Labour Unions

(RILU or Profintern), and was elected to the ECCI. The IWL was recognized as the Comintern's Irish section, and Larkin's union, the Workers' Union of Ireland (WUI), was later affiliated to the Profintern. The future of Irish communism looked fairly promising at this point. The IWL had enrolled 500 members on its inauguration. Over 16,000 had joined the WUI. A further 5,000 workers were affiliated to the Dublin trades council, which had ties with the British Minority Movement (MM). There were also 13,000 members in the IRA, bewildered by the Free State's facile victory in the civil war and, in Moscow's eyes, ripe for the plucking. Mixing admiration for their implacable spirit with a Marxist-Leninist *hauteur* towards their politics, the ECCI assumed that working-class IRA men could be detached from their 'putschist ideas' and 'petit bourgeois' leaders to bolster the fragile insurrectionary tradition in Irish socialism.

Larkin was kept in regular contact with Moscow through three channels: the ECCI plenary; Jack Carney, his *fidus Achates*, who took up a residency as IWL permanent representative in Moscow in 1925; and Comintern agents working in Dublin. Unfortunately for the ECCI, these mechanisms were all dependent on the goodwill of Larkin himself, which was rarely forthcoming. Later the ECCI and the Anglo-American Secretariat (AAS) kept Ireland under review with the aid of intelligence from emissaries to Ireland, British comrades in Moscow and, occasionally, Irish visitors to Moscow or Irish students in the Lenin School. The chronic difficulty lay in policy application. As early as 1925, relations were turning sour. Once they had done his bidding in having the CPI eliminated, Larkin became violently averse to any CPGB involvement in Irish affairs. He also consistently frustrated Comintern efforts to make the IWL a genuine party, knowing that Moscow would use it to control him. Instead, the IWL functioned intermittently as a soapbox for Larkin. Aside from an ephemeral branch in London, organization was confined to Dublin, where no records were kept, no membership cards were issued and the only command structure was Larkin himself. It was not unknown for meetings to be cancelled simply because Larkin could not be present.

For Larkin, communism was just the old class struggle in new clothes. It served his purpose to conceal his scepticism of Bolshevization from his prospective benefactors, but the mask slipped at the RILU congress in 1924 when he ridiculed a paper from Profintern secretary Solomon Lozovsky which suggested that strikes could be co-ordinated through democratic centralism.¹⁶ He would use the rhetoric when it suited him. A letter to the ECCI in 1926, seeking £4,000 to revive the

Irish Worker, concluded that the Irish 'must be Bolshevized'. At the ninth ECCI plenum in 1928 he welcomed the tactics of the third period; it pleased his hosts and allowed him the pleasure of side-swiping the CPGB delegates for their reservations.¹⁷ The empty talk deceived no one. Larkin saw the Comintern as a crock of gold, and his interests were bigger than largesse for a party. What he really wanted was a commercial venture, such as a Soviet co-operative in Dublin, or the export of Soviet oil or timber to Ireland. A sinecure in a business scheme would liberate him financially from the burden of having to run a trade union and allow him to engage in the three things he liked doing best: freelance agitation, editing a newspaper and travel. Larkin claimed repeatedly that ECCI leaders had promised to develop commercial contacts with Ireland. The ECCI ignored the pleas, but promised financial help if the IWL were activated. Invariably, Larkin said he could do nothing without money in advance.

Arguably, the most significant consequence of Bolshevization during the IWL era was what did not happen. Disgusted with the IWL's inactivity, Connolly formed the Workers' Party of Ireland in 1926 and, to Larkin's fury, appealed to the Comintern for recognition. Anxious to retain Larkin's nominal support, and unwilling to endorse any un-Bolshevized elements in Ireland, the ECCI directed the dynamic little party, about 200 strong, to dissolve. Connolly and key cadres accepted that revolutionary discipline required compliance with the Comintern. The stricken rump did not survive beyond 1927.¹⁸

An ultimatum from Moscow finally led the IWL to contest the September 1927 general election, in which it collaborated with Fianna Fáil and vilified the Labour Party. The IWL's three candidates won 12,500 votes (6.5 per cent of the poll), compared with 9,000 votes for the Labour Party in Dublin, and Larkin became the only communist ever elected to Dáil Éireann. As an undischarged bankrupt he was not permitted to take his seat, and lost it the following year in a by-election. His continuing prevarication about forming a party in the wake of the general election caused the ECCI to decide that he should be bypassed by training Irish cadres at the Lenin School and through cultivating links with the IRA.¹⁹ The IRA had begun to move to the left in 1925, and republicans would be instrumental in developing various communist and radical fronts from 1927, notably the League Against Imperialism, the Irish Labour Defence League and Friends of Soviet Russia. Otto Kuusinen intervened personally in 1928 to ensure that united front policy in Ireland inclined to republicans rather than Fianna Fáil. Two high-level debates followed in the ECCI political

secretariat and presidium.²⁰ It is possible that Kuusinen's unprecedented intervention reflected the shift in Comintern thinking from united front to third period tactics; and equally plausible that it was influenced by promising contacts between Razvedupr (Red Army intelligence) and the IRA.²¹ Larkin, of course, ignored the ECCI decisions. Of greater concern to him was the opening of a depot by Russian Oil Products (ROP), a division of the Soviet oil trust Neftetrest, in Dublin in 1928. Here at last was the kind of enterprise he had been pressing for since 1924, and he was outraged when ROP declined to offer him any commercial advantage. His protests – ostensibly about ROP's labour practices – were taken seriously, and Stalin heard the case at a meeting of the Soviet politburo in February 1929; but the politburo stipulated that the WUI was not to be given a closed shop in ROP and no deals were to be done with Larkin on the sale of fuel. Larkin broke with the Comintern and disaffiliated the WUI from the Profintern soon after.²² While having nothing to do with Moscow, he continued to call himself a communist until 1932, when he retired the IWL.

The third period

With Larkin's break, the road to Bolshevization was open. In September 1929, the Comintern sent a three-man commission to Ireland, made up of an Irish graduate of the Lenin School, Dan Buckley, and Bell and Bob Stewart from the CPGB. Drawing mostly on the IRA for members and alumni of the Lenin School for leaders, the commission formed the Revolutionary Workers' Party, renamed the RWG in November 1930. These would be the best of times and the worst of times for the Comintern in Ireland, years of heroic struggle and failure. Organized on an all-Ireland basis for the first time, communists found themselves leading thousands of workers on occasion. Membership of the RWG peaked at 340 in November 1932, but there were no enduring successes, and nuclei could not be sustained outside Dublin and Belfast.²³

Third period Bolshevization differed from that visited on the CPI in 1922–23 in three ways. First, there was considerably closer management from the centre. The leadership in Dublin received detailed directions from the AAS, to which it reported regularly. Anything not considered routine, such as problems of policy, the despatch of agents or requests for money, was handled by one of the higher ECCI organs, usually the political secretariat or the standing commission. From 1929 to 1935 there was usually a resident Comintern 'instructor' in Dublin, posted directly from Moscow, seconded from the CPGB or the MM, or,

in at least one case, sent from the Western European Bureau in Berlin. Undoubtedly, the CPGB had an informal watching brief on Ireland during these years, and its ability to manage Irish affairs was enhanced by Harry Pollitt's acquisition of a radio transmitter in February 1934, enabling him to send and receive encrypted wires to Moscow, which British intelligence did not take long to decipher.²⁴ From 1934 onwards, the CPGB would be a key intermediary in Irish relations with the ECCI. Second, there was an emphasis on the Bolshevization of comrades. 'In our group there are two main tasks', reported the Dublin RWG in January 1931, 'to win new good elements, and get rid of the bad elements'.²⁵ Third, there were tactical and stylistic features peculiar to the third period. For the most part, and on the crucial issue of 'class against class', these were applied faithfully. On the other hand, some commendations – such as opposition to religious 'prejudices' or public self-criticism – received a cold response, while others – such as campaigns for the defence of the Soviet Union – were treated by the Irish as irrelevant to native politics.

The commission sent to Ireland in 1929 was told not to apply the theses of the third period towards Larkin, the WUI or republicans until a firm basis for a party had been established. Larkin did not, as feared, attempt to smash the communists, but he prevented them from infiltrating the WUI. With a few minor exceptions, the wider labour movement was equally impermeable. Manipulating the IRA proved to be much more tedious and complex than the ECCI had envisaged. Rather prematurely, Bell tried to split working-class elements from the IRA in June 1930. When his IRA friends recoiled, Bell was recalled to Moscow. Nonetheless, the ECCI did not reverse this extension of 'class against class'.²⁶ A further problem arose in 1931 as the IRA moved left and launched a socialist political movement, Saor Éire. Moscow regarded it as a rival and was happy to see it suppressed by the government. The RWG's disciplined application of the ECCI line on Saor Éire was impressive evidence of the degree to which they had been Bolshevized. However, the ECCI was prepared to be flexible on tactics and, in 1932, Seán Murray, *de facto* leader of the RWG and CPI general secretary (1933–41), travelled to Moscow to negotiate a modification of policy. While insisting on the principles of the third period, the ECCI allowed the Irish to place a greater emphasis on anti-imperialism. The revision led to a promising collaboration with republicans until late 1932, when the RWG's progress was reversed by its deadliest foe, the Catholic Church. Ireland had been fairly tolerant of communism in the 1920s. Clerical opposition began in 1930. Initially,

republicans challenged the clergy but, by 1933, the intensity of anti-communism was causing the IRA leadership to distance itself from the RWG. In Belfast, the RWG faced equally trenchant hostility from Protestant clerics, the Unionist Party and the Orange Order. Despite the increasingly toxic atmosphere – membership had fallen to about 250 – Murray bowed to ECCI pressure to transform the RWG into the CPI in June 1933. On its foundation, the IRA formally abjured communism for the first time.

The IRA army council's opposition to communism would contribute to a split in the army in April 1934, when the left decamped to constitute the Republican Congress. Another factor in the split was the army council's reluctance to endorse action against the fascist movement, the Blueshirts. Within months, the Congress had blossomed into a coalition of some 8,000 republicans, trade unionists and communists. The ECCI's response illustrates the gradual shift in policy from the third period at this time. To begin with, the CPI offered joint action with the Congress only on specific campaigns, such as anti-fascism. In September, the ECCI cautiously approved a united front with the Congress on the central issue of anti-imperialism. And, by January 1935, the ECCI was enthusiastic about CPI collaboration with the Congress. Meanwhile, at its inaugural conference in September 1934, the Congress had divided sharply over strategy. One faction argued that it ought to continue as a coalition. Another favoured its transformation into a political party. The CPI delegates voted for the coalition option, to the fury of the ECCI, which had instructed the CPI to put forward an independent position. The instructions had been wired to Harry Pollitt, and there is compelling evidence that, through negligence rather than design, Pollitt misled Murray as to how the CPI should vote.²⁷ Murray's standing with the ECCI never recovered, and henceforth the CPI would become subordinate to the CPGB. Neither did the Republican Congress recover from its internal friction. By 1935, it was a spent force.

Stalinization: the retreat to Moscow

The process by which the CPI changed from being an Irish revolutionary party into, primarily, a pro-Soviet organization, occurred gradually. It was an indigenous development, driven by the growing importance of international politics, the pride and sense of relevance acquired by communists from their role in the Spanish Civil War and Second World War, the replacement of working-class and republican members

with more cosmopolitan bourgeois and intellectual elements, the traumatic effect of the Cold War on Catholic Ireland, and the realization that communists were never likely to become a force without some extraneous shock to the Irish polity. Paradoxically, the revision of centre-periphery relations approved at the seventh Comintern congress contributed to Stalinization by weakening Moscow's involvement in Irish politics, and shifting its interest from the welfare of the CPI to the implications of Irish affairs for European politics. With the dissolution of the regional secretariats in 1935, the CPI was placed under the secretariat of André Marty, who was happy to leave Ireland to the CPGB. The last direct contact between the CPI and the ECCI took place in 1937, when the chairman of the Dublin branch visited Moscow.²⁸

The CPI welcomed the popular front as a more moderate and realistic tactic. Murray had lost faith in industrial workers, and told Moscow frankly that republicans were the CPI's only friends.²⁹ The popular front did indeed prove to be a fruitless quest until 18 July 1936. Ireland, per capita, probably sent more volunteers to the Spanish Civil War than any other country. When over 650 joined an 'Irish Brigade' to fight for Franco, the war acquired a direct Irish resonance. Given the brigade's pedigree in the Blueshirts and the pro-treaty forces in the Irish Civil War, republicans felt honour-bound to respond, and were prominent in the 'Connolly Column', a blanket term for some 240 Irish who served in defence of the Spanish Republic. Of these, 34 can be identified as CPI men.³⁰ A few, for whom Spain would be the defining event of their lives, would have a guiding influence on Irish communism from the 1950s. Spain dominated the CPI's weekly, the *Worker*, and its popular front successor, the *Irish Democrat*, published jointly by the CPI, the Republican Congress and the Socialist Party, Northern Ireland. The *Democrat* lasted from March to December 1937, and its demise reflected the abatement of Ireland's hitherto passionate engagement with Spain. As the CPI's atrophy continued, Pollitt favoured its liquidation and the CPGB agreed that Murray ought to be replaced, while conceding that a successor was not obvious.³¹

The war disrupted communications between Ireland and Russia. The archives hold no Comintern position statements on Ireland after 1939. In December 1940, a Comintern review noted that its only knowledge of the CPI came from occasional articles by Murray in the New York *Sunday Worker*, statements in *Rundschau über Politik, Wirtschaft & Arbeiterbewegung* and *World News and Views*, and a telegram from the British *Daily Worker* in June 1940. Significantly, almost half of the four-page review was devoted to 'the matter of Irish naval bases', with the

analysis based on press and radio reports from London, Germany and the United States.³² The CPI was nonetheless enjoying a minor recovery. Membership of the Dublin branch had fallen below 50, and it had abandoned hope of building a base in the labour movement, but it found a purpose in articulating the communist view of the world crisis. In 1939, it launched a new paper, the *Irish Workers' Weekly*. The *Workers' Weekly* faithfully reflected the orthodoxy and, in a period of repeated modification of the ECCI line, the CPI became completely reliant for guidance on the CPGB. For the first time, the CPI was truly a mouthpiece of Moscow, and indeed of London.

Initially, the *Workers' Weekly* called for pressure on Britain to speed up its sluggish moves towards an Anglo-French-Soviet pact.³³ 'Nazis can never be our allies', declared the *Workers' Weekly* on 5 August. On 26 August, it welcomed the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact with the headline 'Soviet Union's policy strengthens peace'. On the outbreak of war on 3 September, the CPI, like the CPGB, amended the line to depict the British and French governments as imperialist, while supporting the war itself. The *Workers' Weekly* condemned the Labour Party's silence on the war, saying that if Éire's neutrality made sense, 'the Irish working class cannot be "neutral" on the issues of Fascism versus democracy'.³⁴ On 16 September, it printed a CPI manifesto calling for a people's war against Nazism. The ECCI's 'short thesis', characterizing the war as imperialist, was first reflected in the *Workers' Weekly* on 16 October. The CPI's official history makes no reference to the effect of the revised line on Dublin but, in its only admission of internal dissention, says of Belfast: 'As might be expected, there was some confusion among Party members in the North and it took much discussion to convince some members of the correctness of the party's political position.'³⁵ Over the coming months, the CPI followed the Comintern's position round the dial to the point where the *Workers' Weekly* became more hostile to the imperialists – the Anglo-French – than the Nazis.

Neutrality and the national question were the key issues for the CPI. Their importance was underscored in an article in *Izvestia*, reprinted in the *Workers' Weekly* on 6 April 1940. Irish neutrality was too of great propaganda value to the CPGB. In the spring of 1941, the survival of the Dublin CPI seemed assured, and a new leadership was finally appointed. If membership remained stubbornly small, the future looked promising. The CPI's policy of neutrality and anti-partitionism chimed with public sentiment, and workers were chafing under the burden of wartime social inequality. The *Workers' Weekly* regularly

reported improvements in sales – an extra 1,400 copies was claimed on 31 August 1940 – and acquired added value from suppression of the communist press in Britain in January 1941, after which it published CPGB statements on occasion. Above all, communists believed they had a vital role in explaining Stalin's war aims and in keeping Ireland neutral.

Attitudes towards the war in the Belfast branch were more ambivalent, but a common all-Ireland position was maintained, and Belfast comrades campaigned for Northern Ireland's withdrawal from the war.³⁶ Stormont suppressed the *Workers' Weekly* in April. Its replacement, a Northern paper entitled *Red Hand*, was banned in August for printing an IRA statement, and leading communists were imprisoned for causing 'disaffection'.³⁷ In the summer of 1941, the Belfast branch came under pressure from the CPGB to dissolve. There was considerable resistance as it was the better of the two Irish branches, having attracted a number of intellectuals and Jews and, unlike Dublin, having some roots in the trade unions.³⁸ The basic problem, for either London or Moscow, was the difficulty of sustaining its opposition to the war. All changed on 22 June. Now the party in Éire – in effect the Dublin branch – came under the axe as the CPGB, knowing the Comintern wanted unqualified commitment to the war effort, was doubtful about how Moscow's writ would run in neutral Ireland. The simple solution was dissolution; a case of, as Stalin might have put it, 'no party, no problem'. After a 'great amount of debate', the branch voted by 11–9 to 'suspend independent activity' and deploy its resources in the Labour Party with the intention of working for a Labour–Fianna Fáil government that would bring Éire into the war.³⁹

Notwithstanding a notional commitment to Irish unity, the CPI was a Northern Ireland party from July 1941. Its vigorous pro-war policy and the phenomenal enthusiasm for all things Soviet throughout the United Kingdom, caused membership to mushroom to 1,000 by 1943.⁴⁰ Though it had withered to 172 members by 1949, its largely Protestant support base, and the retention of positions of influence won during the war in the predominantly Protestant engineering and shipbuilding trades, discouraged it from association with republicanism.⁴¹ Éire comrades resurfaced in 1948 in the Irish Workers' League, later the Irish Workers' Party. It was hard for them to argue against the pragmatic partitionism of the Communist Party, Northern Ireland, as it came to be called, when they themselves felt so beleaguered by the obsessive anti-communism and virtually unchallenged social power of the Irish Catholic Church from the start of the Cold War to the

ecumenical pontificate of John XXIII. Cordial relations between the parties were underpinned by their shared implacable and blandly uncritical pro-Soviet mentality. Attitudes towards partition in the Northern party changed in the 1960s and both parties united as the third CPI in 1970.

Socialism in one rock pool

Weber's characterization of the Stalinized party is valid for Ireland. With the exception of Larkin's IWL, the Irish sections all adopted the Comintern model of organization, leading to domination by the apparatus; they sought to apply factionalism, even where it had little rationale; they welcomed dependence on Moscow; and they were increasingly marginalized in politics. It is more difficult to determine the appropriateness for Ireland of Weber's appraisal of the process and consequences of Stalinization. However applicable the critique may be to the major parties, the Irish experience raises certain problems in respect of the small fry. And these may be of comparative relevance as, if not as important as the mighty KPD, the Irish minnows were more typical of Comintern affiliates, nearly half of whom had fewer than 1,000 members.⁴²

The immediate and obvious feature of the Irish case was the overwhelming dependence on Moscow. It is unlikely that a revolutionary party, outside the republican tradition at least, would have survived for very long without the Comintern. Before the 1920s, no such party had exceeded the seven-year stretch of Irish Socialist Republican Party, which was founded by James Connolly and collapsed after his departure to the United States in 1903. Moscow was vital to the creation of all its Irish sections, and made a substantial input into the second CPI, training its leading cadres, supplying agents and finance, and offering a model of party and cadre discipline on the basis of good intelligence on Ireland. One need only compare the first and second CPIs to appreciate the difference that this made. To see Irish communists as an indigenous movement selectively applying an international ideology to native circumstances would be grossly to exaggerate their independence. With the exception of Larkin, they were, as they wanted to be, a link in a world party, completing the revolution in the remaining five-sixths of the earth.

If the argument that Stalinization divided the left and enforced self-defeating policies on its affiliates has relevance to Ireland, it is in relation to Saor Éire and the Republican Congress. The Comintern's greatest success, and its greatest mistakes, came in its relations with

republicans. The 'class against class' line, so often deplored by historians for its counterproductive sectarianism, made little difference to the RWG's prospects of making inroads into the virtually impermeable trade unions. But it did discourage the strengthening of links with republicans at a time when the IRA was most susceptible to communism. The CPI would acknowledge the errors involved in 1935. Yet, here again, it would be wrong to depict the Comintern as alien to domestic politics or largely negative in its impact. From 1922, the ECCI cultivated the IRA directly, and republicans turned repeatedly to communism, despite the debility of indigenous communist organization, because the Comintern and the Soviet Union appeared to offer an effective model of revolution.

A further problem with Weber's concept of Stalinization – and again is most likely to arise in respect of small, insignificant parties – is that it does not allow for differentiation between a party which saw itself as a local spearpoint of the global revolution, and one which was essentially an apologist of the Soviet state. If we accept the latter as the hallmark of Stalinism, then the paradox of the Irish situation was that the Comintern delayed Stalinization. Before the seventh world congress, its overriding objective in Ireland was not to enforce compliance with a global line, but to make a revolution. Even during the third period, the ECCI emerges as more anxious to be informed and responsive than dogmatic and dictatorial. Up to 1935, it went to some lengths to keep itself abreast of Irish affairs. Its unrealistic expectation of what communists could achieve was due more to the blind faith of ideologists than poor intelligence. There was an abiding concern to tailor tactics to Irish conditions, and a reluctance to reach decisions without consulting Irish comrades. Murray's ability to secure Moscow's approval of a renewed emphasis on anti-imperialism in 1932 indicates that if Comintern theory was not open to question, negotiation on specifics – at the height of the third period – was possible.

When Stalinization set in, it was a voluntarily, organic and rational response to a changing environment. Defending the USSR gave a purpose to a party that had lost its revolution. It was too an incremental process. The popular front signified a new congruity between Comintern and Soviet policy, but it was not seen primarily in those terms by the CPI. The Spanish Civil War was, in some degree, a vicarious Irish civil war. From its inception, the *Irish Workers' Weekly* attached great importance to the security of the USSR, but only in the wake of 'that pact' was it evident to the CPI that the Comintern was no more than Stalin's first line of defence. And after 22 June 1941, that was a good place for a loyal communist to be.

Notes

- 1 I am obliged to the British Academy and the University of Ulster for funding research on which this chapter is based.
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- 3 S. Bowler, 'Seán Murray, 1898–1961, and the Pursuit of Stalinism in One Country', *Saothar*, 18 (1993), 44; W. Anderson, *James Connolly and the Irish Left* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), p. 136.
- 4 Bowler, 'Seán Murray', 44; P. Jackson, '"A Rather One Sided Fight': The Worker and the Spanish Civil War', *Saothar*, 23 (1998), 79–87.
- 5 CPI, *Communist Party of Ireland: Outline History* (Dublin: CPI, 1975); H. Morrissey, 'The First Communist Party of Ireland, 1921–23', *Irish Socialist Review*, Summer (1983); J. Deasy, 'Seán Murray: Republican and Marxist', *Saothar*, 19 (1994), 13.
- 6 E. O'Connor, 'Communists, Russia, and the IRA, 1920–23', *Historical Journal*, 46, 1 (2003), 115–31.
- 7 The Irish Trade Union Congress added 'and Labour Party' to its title in 1914, and was known from 1918 to 1930 as the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress. Between 1914 and 1930, the Labour Party was not distinct from Congress. On the SPI, see E. O'Connor, 'True Bolsheviks? The Rise and Fall of the Socialist Party of Ireland, 1917–21', in D. George Boyce and A. O'Day (eds.), *Ireland in Transition, 1867–1921* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 209–22.
- 8 *The Communist International in Lenin's Time, Volume One: Workers' of the World and Oppressed Peoples Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder 1991), pp. 248–9.
- 9 Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI), Moscow, undated document, without a rubric, 1920, 495/89/3–24; A. Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919–22* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1995), pp. 189–92; National Archives, Dublin, Dáil Éireann papers, DE 2/119.
- 10 J. Murphy, *New Horizons* (London: John Lane, 1941), pp. 184–6. Murphy uncertainly recalls one of the IRA chiefs as Michael Mallin and says he kept insisting he was a soldier and not a politician. Mallin was a Citizen Army officer, executed in May 1916. A confusion with Ernie O'Malley is a strong possibility. Murphy does not name the other man.
- 11 RGASPI, untitled report, undated [1922], 495/89/13–83/84; Connolly to Luise, 22 August 1922, 495/89/12–36.
- 12 RGASPI, McLay to Luise, Report on the Situation in Ireland, 26 June 1924, 495/89/27–10/14; Resolution of the Presidium of the ECCI on the Irish Question, 13 December 1922, 495/89/11–6; Murphy to the Comintern, 12 December 1922, 495/89/11–15.
- 13 RGASPI, report by MacManus and the Political Bureau of the CPGB, 11 October 1923, 495/38/7–236/241.
- 14 V. I. Lenin, 'Class War in Dublin', *Severnaya Pravda*, 29 August 1913.
- 15 See E. O'Connor, *James Larkin* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).
- 16 E. Larkin, *James Larkin: Irish Labour Leader, 1876–1947* (London: Routledge, 1965), pp. 277–8.

- 17 RGASPI, letter from Larkin and statement, undated [1926], 495/89/110–136/7; Larkin, *James Larkin*, pp. 291–2.
- 18 C. Maguire, 'Roddy Connolly and the Workers' Party of Ireland in 1926', *Saothar*, 30 (2005), 33–45.
- 19 B. McLoughlin, 'Proletarian Academics or Party Functionaries? Irish Communists at the International Lenin School, Moscow, 1927–37', *Saothar*, 22 (1997), 63–79.
- 20 RGASPI, Minutes of the ECCI Political Secretariat, 13 January 1928, 495/3/51–43/93; Protokoll Nr.109 der Sitzung des Präsidiums des EKKI, 28 January 1928, 495/2/95–86/187.
- 21 E. K. Poretsky, *Our Own People: A Memoir of 'Ignace Reiss' and His Friends* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press 1969), pp. 74 and 84. See also the *Daily Mail*, 14 May 1930.
- 22 RGASPI, Protocol no. 63 of the Politburo, 7 February 1929, 17/3/725–1/2; Letters from Larkin, undated [1929], 495/89/49–18, 495/19/104–137.
- 23 RGASPI, Report re: national meeting of RWG, 5–6 November 1932, 495/89/82–14/18; *Irish Workers' Voice*, 22 October 1932.
- 24 A. Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 210.
- 25 RGASPI, Abridgement of report of Neptun, 26 January 1931, 495/89/64–2.
- 26 RGASPI, Draft Resolution on Ireland, 1 September 1930, 495/89/61–19/22.
- 27 RGASPI, To the Secretariat CPI, 19 September 1934, 495/14/334–24/27; Memo to the CPI, 16 September 1934, 495/89/96–46/47; National Archives of the United Kingdom, London, Government Code and Cypher School decrypts of Comintern messages, 1930–45, HW 17/17. I am obliged to Eunan O'Halpin and Barry McLoughlin for drawing my attention to these decrypts.
- 28 RGASPI, Proposals in connection with the CPI, 8 May 1937, 495/89/102–1/4; Memorandum on Ireland, 22 May 1937, 495/89/102–5/9; Meeting on the Irish question, 23 May 1937, 495/14/339–27/38.
- 29 RGASPI, Séan Murray before the Anglo American Secretariat, 19 July, 495/14/20–1/27; Proposals for the application of the united front in Ireland (by Irish delegation), 26 August 1935, 495/14/335–84/86.
- 30 This figure is based on newspaper reports, websites, RGASPI, International Brigades in the Spanish Republican Army, 545/6/–, and Marx Memorial Library, London, International Brigades Memorial Archive. For more details see E. O'Connor, 'Behind the Legend: Waterfordmen in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War', *Decies: Journal of the Waterford Archaeological & Historical Society*, 61 (2005), 267–85.
- 31 RGASPI, Zusammenfassung der Debatte zu dieser Frage auf der ZK-Sitzung der KP Englands am 1 und 2 Juli 1938, 495/20/252–36/49.
- 32 RGASPI, Notiz über Irland, 11 December 1940, 495/14/340–6/9.
- 33 *Irish Workers' Weekly*, 22 April and 19 August 1939.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 9 September 1939.
- 35 CPI, *Communist Party of Ireland*, p. 38.
- 36 *Irish Workers' Weekly*, 11 and 23 November, 3 December 1939, 6 January 1940.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 24 March to 13 April, 5–26 October, 9 November 1940.
- 38 I am obliged to Andrew Boyd for his recollections of the CPI in 1940–41.

- 39 O'Connor, *James Larkin*, p. 107; Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, pp. 191–8.
- 40 H. Morrissey, 'Betty Sinclair: A Woman's Fight for Socialism, 1910–1981', *Saothar*, 9 (1983), 126–7.
- 41 Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, p. 122.
- 42 T. Rees and A. Thorpe (eds), 'Introduction', *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 2.

14

‘Their unCommunist Stand’: Chicago’s Foreign Language- Speaking Communists and the Question of Stalinization, 1928–35

Randi Storch

Even though the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) was one of the smaller branches of the Communist International (Comintern), it was the most significant leftist group within the United States from its founding in Chicago in 1919 until its decline, beginning in 1956. For this reason, the nature of American communism – a Stalinized party or grass-roots movement – has been the subject of much debate. This chapter questions the absolute dualism of this debate by examining the experience of Chicago’s foreign language-speaking ethnics. With a focus on these two distinctive factors – location and ethnicity – this chapter will argue that, by the mid-1930s, Stalinization in the CPUSA was incomplete and that to best understand the experience of American communism scholars must move beyond a binary understanding of communists as either Moscow’s puppets or independent radicals.

While Hermann Weber’s conception of Stalinization has not had the influence in the United States as it has in European circles, his emphasis on Moscow’s fundamental control over the Germany party by the late 1920s has its counterpart in Theodore Draper’s writings on the history and nature of American communism. Writing almost a decade before Weber, Draper concluded that by 1929 ‘nothing and no one could alter the fact that the American Communist Party had become an instrument of the Russian Communist Party’.¹ Draper and those writing in his tradition see Soviet Russia’s domination over the American communist project as the only relevant piece of the story, and the fact of Soviet control by 1929 as a foregone conclusion. Revisionist scholars in the United States, like their German counterparts, downplay Stalinism’s effect and depict communists as idealized, organic radicals; but, more recently, the bulk of scholarship published

on the CPUSA has returned to the emphasis of the Draper/Weber tradition. Bryan Palmer, a socialist historian, challenged Draper's teleological argument and yet agrees that, in the end, foreign domination fundamentally shaped the American party. To him, Stalin's brutal control of the Soviet party and the international movement destroyed revolutionary socialism, narrowed the communist project to revolution in one country and dominated the priorities of the Comintern and its international parties. 'Only if we are capable of seeing Stalinism's degenerations, and how they registered in the transformation of Soviet politics and the role of the Comintern over the course of the 1920s', Palmer argues, 'can we appreciate what was the foundational premise of the American revolutionary left.'² Whether discussing the nature of communism in Europe or the United States, the terms of the debate for the past 40 years have shaped sharply dichotomous interpretations of the communist experience.³

Previously classified, local American communist records in Moscow (open to western scholars only since the 1990s) offer new insight into the experience of the CPUSA and the question of Stalinization, allowing scholars to move beyond stark dualities. The Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI) includes more than 4,000 files on the CPUSA for the years between 1919 and the early 1940s, with its richest material relating to the period between 1928 and 1935. These sources place activists in particular workplaces, neighbourhoods, schools and clubs, fleshing out communists' social networks and political trajectories. They put a human face on American communism and thus allow scholars to tell a detailed story that places the personal and political choices that communist activists made into the social and political context in which they lived. And by revealing the tensions that existed between more and less disciplined party members, they reveal the complexities of organizing and belonging to an international movement.⁴

If Weber, Draper and those writing in their tradition see the fundamental characteristic in national communist stories to be Moscow's control, the case of Chicago's foreign language-speaking ethnics suggests taking another look. With little more than half of its 1930 membership drawn from a diverse pool of ethnic groups, Chicago's party leaders had to overcome exceptional challenges. Arriving to communism from socialist movements with decentralized radical cultures, Chicago's foreign language-speaking members were not effectively Bolshevized. Unlike Weber's conclusions concerning the German party, communist leaders in Chicago lacked organizational resources – and, in some cases, the will – to subordinate their members to total democratic centralism.⁵ Instead party ethnics ran newspapers, clubs and fraternal organizations

that provided them with separate bases of operation that continued to nurture and support independent views and activity within the American party. In turn, these ethnic institutions provided Chicago's party with much-needed funds, meeting space and cadre. Rather than Weber's model of paid functionaries who were dependent on the Comintern, Chicago's party structure points to a variety of loyalties and pressures shaping decision-making and experience. City leaders' emphasis on trade union organizing among American-born workers, moreover, meant that work within ethnic groups was often overlooked. Though self-identified as communists, many in these groups interpreted party policy through their own lenses. The activity and attitudes of this group between 1928 and 1935, when scholars generally believe the party to have been its most sectarian, suggest a more complex world within the American party than the Stalinization theory allows.⁶

After describing the sources of the diverse ethnic base within the Chicago party and the inability of party leaders to shake these foreign language members of their former radical cultures, this chapter will describe various ways in which Chicago's ethnics maintained some independence as communists. Of course, Stalinism *did* matter to the American communist movement; communists *did* follow the Marxist–Leninist hierarchical style of organization and this *did* require members to follow party policy. The party line shaped the activity, language and structure of Chicago's local party. And yet to fully understand American communism, one must move beyond these Stalinist policies to the everyday local experience. Many in Chicago's party were proud communists. They believed in the Soviet Union, the Comintern and CPUSA policy. But they did not always follow the rules. Some of these rule-breakers were newcomers, others were long-time party leaders and still others had their own bases of power that party leaders had to share. Each had their own reason for stepping out of line: outright defiance, wilful ignorance, traditions of their radical past, sensitivity to the particular people they organized and the politics of party subcultures. Even though some were not compliant, they *were* party members. American communism embraced both Stalinist stalwarts *and* their less disciplined troops. This mix best explains the experience of communism in the United States.⁷

Organizing Chicago's foreign-born radicals

At the core of the Chicago membership was its foreign language-speaking members who flocked to the party after the Bolshevik Revolution. Inspired by the revolution's triumph, members of the Socialist Party's left wing organized an American Communist Party in 1919, to

which they brought their semi-autonomous foreign language federations, newspapers, cultural groups, institutions and willingness to quarrel. Despite party leaders' attempts to 'Americanize' these workers and encourage them to broaden the party's reach to native-born workers at work and within union halls, ethnic radical subcultures persisted. Drawn to the party from their independent bases of activity (clubs, meeting halls, open-air forums), foreign language-speaking communists did not march to a single drum beat.

Writing about the various ethnic radical traditions co-existing in the United States' communist party, Draper noted that the 'Bolshevik Revolution in Russia of November 1917 did not immediately displace these older traditions'.⁸ This was especially the case in Chicago, where an assortment of ethnic radicals mingled with native-born activists representing a conglomeration of leftist cultures, traditions and experiences. Alfred Wagenknecht, son of a German shoemaker, fled from Germany with his family to avoid anti-socialist laws passed there. Joining the left wing of the Socialist Party, Wagenknecht played a crucial role in forming the Communist Labor Party, the United Communist Party and, finally, the Workers' (Communist) Party. Nicholas Dozenberg, an immigrant from Latvia and member of the International Association of Machinists, became business manager for the communist paper *The Voice of Labor* in 1921. They were joined in the party by Joseph Podulski, a former member of the Socialist Party in Poland and the United States, who was also a member of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union. Ellis Chryssos, born in Turkey to a family whose members became refugees in Greece, edited *Empros*, a weekly organ of the Workers' Party Greek federation and acted as the federation's secretary. Arne Swabeck, a Danish immigrant and former Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and Socialist Party member, became a leader in Seattle's 1919 general strike before coming to Chicago. Swabeck served as head of the Chicago Workers' Party at the same time as he acted as a Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) delegate from the Painters' Union. Vittorio Vidali came to Chicago in the early 1920s fresh from anti-fascist battles in Italy and eager to become involved in the Italian-American communist movement.⁹ Indeed, Vidali commented explicitly on the diversity of experience he found in Chicago. One cold and snowy morning he made his way into the party's main office on North State Street:

The desks were scattered around the room without any definite plan. The Yugoslavs, the Greeks and the Latin Americans were next to us Italians. The richer sections, which had their own head-

quarters in Chicago or in New York, daily paper and periodicals, such as the Russians, the Jews, the Finns, the Poles and others, had their own desk also in this big room where all the nationalities were represented. In one corner sat the general secretary of the Party, C. E. Ruthenberg with his secretary. There was a constant buzz of voices in all the languages of the world, sometimes interrupted by a laugh, exclamations and the clicking of the typewriters.¹⁰

Beginning in 1925 when the CPUSA inaugurated its 'Bolshevization' campaign – an attempt to 'Americanize' the party – this rich and diverse base of foreign language-speaking groups seemed more of a liability than an asset. CPUSA leaders increasingly focused on recruiting native-born workers and reorienting the party from one based on the Socialist Party's foreign language units to one organized by neighbourhoods and factories. Steve Nelson recalled: 'of a membership of some seventeen thousand, fewer than two thousand were involved in English-speaking groups, and it was seen as imperative to get beyond the language barrier'.¹¹ Leaders hoped that by grouping members where they lived and worked rather than by the language they spoke they would nudge them closer to 'Americanization' and the American labour movement.

At least initially, it looked like Chicago's party was experiencing success. A 1925 report indicated that out of 930 registered members, 340 were in trade unions. The unions most represented by the factory groups included clothing, machinists, printing, railroad and steel industries. Other lesser communist trade union outposts included building trades, teachers' federation, united wallpaper trades, egg inspectors, laundry workers, musicians, watch and clockmakers, cigar makers, milk drivers, IWW window washers, janitors, leather workers, newspaper drivers, butchers and coopers.¹² Martin Abern, Chicago's organizational secretary during restructuring, initially reported that reorganization enlivened Chicago's communists and better prepared them to connect to fellow American workers. Nine out of ten former dues-paying members re-registered in Chicago as communists following the reorganization, a significantly higher proportion than the national average of 50 per cent.¹³ Foreign language-speaking communists reported satisfaction with the 'change which makes it possible for them to learn the English language and really participate in the American labor movement'. In the street nuclei, communists reported that they 'cannot be so lax as they have been in the former language branches. Work is being demanded of them.'¹⁴

Even in his enthusiasm, however, Abern hinted at the problems reorganization created. Members of this heavily foreign-born organization did not mingle easily outside their ethnic enclaves. Communists in the steel industry had the greatest difficulty because no English-speaking comrades worked there, bringing communists to exist in 'very much mixed national units' and complicating the ability of activists to communicate and act together. In addition, Abern admitted that not all of the language federations supported the reorganization: the Finnish and Lettish groups openly opposed it.¹⁵

Party leaders also found that despite their attempts to 'Americanize' their membership, street organizations still tended to group communists according to ethnic background. Czechs, for example, populated seven different street branches, including one exclusively for women. Their organization was matched by the Lithuanians, who also maintained seven neighbourhood branches. The Scandinavians organized three, including a former socialist club known as their Karl Marx branch, one in Lakeview and one on the South Side. Two Polish branches met, one on the North Side and one on the South Side. The Ukrainians also maintained two branches. Russians, Armenians, Rumanians, Spanish and Bulgarians each maintained a branch in neighbourhoods where members of their respective ethnic group clustered.¹⁶

As it turned out, Abern's initial reports of ethnic enthusiasm proved hollow. Communist leaders, who worked diligently to keep these formally socialist, nationality-based groups within the party, recognized their persistent independence. A tenuous bind held Armenians to the party, and records show that Czech branch no. 3 was 'not extremely convinced but follow[ing] along'. At one point in 1925, party leaders conceded that they had lost their Italian connections, but the situation had improved by the year's end. In the eleventh ward, 12 of 18 members agreed to stay in the party and almost 70 per cent of those in the nineteenth ward agreed to remain communists. Others in the thirty-first ward and in Cicero still had to be contacted individually.¹⁷

Negotiation would continue between city party leaders and Chicago's foreign language-speaking ethnics from 1928 through to 1935 because foreign-born communists continued to comprise half of the city's membership. The 1930 census shows that of 3,376,438 Chicagoans, 24.9 per cent had been born in another country, while 52.3 per cent of the Chicago party members were foreign-born.¹⁸ From available figures, it is clear that Russians, South Slavs, Lithuanians, Hungarians and Finns were over-represented, while Poles, Germans, Italians and Mexicans were under-represented.¹⁹

Table 14.1 Nationality breakdown of Chicago's foreign-born population and foreign-born communist membership, 1930–31

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Chicago Foreign-born</i>	<i>Chicago Communist Party</i>
Russian	9.1 per cent	14.5 per cent
South Slavic	1.9 per cent	10.4 per cent
Lithuanian	3.6 per cent	9.9 per cent
Polish	17.3 per cent	6.5 per cent
Hungarian	1.8 per cent	6.5 per cent
German	12.9 per cent	5.5 per cent
Italian	8.6 per cent	5.3 per cent
Finnish	0.3 per cent	0.8 per cent
Mexican	2.2 per cent	0.6 per cent
Jewish	N/A ²⁰	22.0 per cent
Miscellaneous	42.4 per cent ²¹	17.0 per cent

Communism in Chicago was largely dependent on these foreign language-speaking communists' sharing their community's radical institutions and cultures. In West Side neighbourhoods, for example, the party used community institutions as the settings for their meetings, such as the Labor Lyceum Hall and the Ukrainian People's Auditorium. Relying on the fact that this neighbourhood was home to the largest Polish community in the city, party organizers called meetings of the Polish anti-fascist committee in the area. They also drew heavily on the large Jewish community and organized gatherings at the Jewish Club. With so many of the residents in this area on relief (22.8 per cent), communists successfully recruited many to its Unemployed Council meetings at the Folkets Hus, a cultural meeting hall owned by non-party but sympathetic residents.²²

They also built on a neighbourhood's long-time leftist traditions. Ukrainians and Poles brought socialist customs to Chicago, and for both the plight of their homeland figured prominently in their activities. Rather than join community churches, these socialists and communists identified with the secular and ethnic cultures that leftist movements offered. The West Side Ukrainian People's Auditorium, one of the Chicago party's most important meeting halls, competed with the Ukrainian churches and fraternal organizations for activists. Polish communists had an even tougher battle against the Polish church, which had considerable sway over Chicago's Poles. In 1929, the party held a counter-demonstration in Wicker Park's Schoenhaffer Hall to protest what party leaders entitled the 'fascist Pulaski day celebration'. With 60,000 attending the official Pulaski day event, the party's

400 protesters demonstrated the challenges communists faced in the Polish community.²³ Like Ukrainian and Polish socialists, Jewish socialists brought their beliefs and culture with them on their journey to the United States, developing a rich leftist enclave complete with newspapers, theatres and restaurants. Building on Jewish interests and populations on Chicago's West Side, communists – beginning in 1929 – held meetings on the question of Palestine. This is the same area where in 1933 much of the party's anti-fascist work began. Whereas many West Side religious Jews responded more to calls from philanthropic organizations, working-class Jews often responded to the socialists' and communists' pleas; 196 were registered with the party in 1931.²⁴

With these strong institutional bases grounding them into communities and radical traditions, local ethnic party members represented resistant subcultures that party leaders' 'Americanization' campaigns were unable to shake. Maintaining ties to both their ethnic radical traditions *and* the American party, Chicago's foreign language-speaking members maintained some of their independence.

Chicago's autonomous ethnics

When people from all over the world came together under the banner of Soviet communism, internationalism made Chicago's leaders proud. Statements of support to the revolutionary movement in Lithuania during a Lithuanian buro meeting, or the plans of Chicago's Yugoslavian buro to correspond with Yugoslavian communists in Vienna, confirmed such international ties.²⁵ But white ethnics' lack of party discipline (particularly international loyalties) and prejudices violated party policies and suggest ethnic subcultures existed in the Chicago party.

The party's own structure supported them. In 1929, party leaders decided to modify their organization once again, this time organizing each language group into their own buro with representation at national, city and neighbourhood level. Language buro leaders at the city level assigned rank-and-file ethnic counterparts to work in fractions. As editor of *Radnik* and leader of the city's language groups, Zinich liked to remind Chicago's communist ethnics that: 'Fractions are organs of the party within non-party organizations. They are not independent, fully authorized organizations but are subordinate to the competent local party committee.' As fraction members, ethnic communists were to steer these mass organizations towards the issues and activities that communists supported, such as union building, un-

employment campaigns and the protection of foreign-born activists against deportation, whilst also fighting 'social fascist' tendencies among their leaders and all the while bringing the foreign language masses 'closer to the American revolutionary labor movement'.²⁶

One of the problems in seeing these tasks through was that many of Chicago's ethnic communists maintained the independent sub-cultures of the Socialist Party's foreign language federations; organizations that functioned autonomously from the Socialist Party's English-language organization. Within their federations, foreign language-speaking socialists talked about their own concerns, handled their problems internally and became involved in whatever activity they chose. 'Federalism' frustrated communist leaders. They regularly tried to rid their ranks of its tendencies and to bring foreign language members closer to party discipline, party activity and self-criticism.²⁷

But federalist tendencies persisted. Party records reveal the leadership's frustration with the Greeks for being 'hard to control', and with the Czechs who were unable to shift from a federalist way of organizing themselves. 'I doubt if [the Czechs] have read [sic] the instruction sent to them from here', one party leader complained.²⁸ In one case, the leader of the Finnish buro got into a battle with a worker who was new to the CPUSA, but who had been a member of the Socialist Party's Finnish Federation. Both blamed the other for deviating from the party line and causing disruption in the federation; a struggle rooted in their both having been federation members. Such inner debate carried on in the Jewish buro as well, particularly on the question of Palestine.²⁹

As late as 1931, groups of Lithuanians were violating the party line. Before a meeting of party and non-party shareholders of the party's Lithuanian paper, *Vilnis*, a group of communists tried to convince those assembled that the party had wrongfully expelled one of their fellow ethnic comrades and that accusations made concerning the danger of racism at the paper and among Lithuanian communists were exaggerated. Lithuanian language leaders saw this airing of dirty laundry among non-party members as a 'gross violation of Party discipline'. Differences among party loyalists escalated to such a degree that national CPUSA leaders agreed to send a delegation of Lithuanians to Moscow where they would have their positions heard and decided upon by a Comintern commission.³⁰

Historic divisions and conflicts between communist ethnics were also known to turn communists against one another. In an attempt to create united committees against fascism, for example, the Chicago

party ran up against a wall when it came to their Yugoslav and Balkan comrades. Historic prejudice between these ethnic workers kept them from wanting to join for any cause. In this case, party leaders were unwilling to reprimand individuals. A letter from the CPUSA's language committee to a leader in Chicago stated: 'It is impossible to draw in all the mass organizations that are building a united front on jugoslav [sic] issues also into the Balkan committees ... because the problem is to some extent new for them because of the national prejudices.' Understanding the historic hatred that existed between certain groups, party leaders encouraged starting slowly with a few individuals who showed leadership on the issue.³¹

While historic hatred among white ethnics might be tolerated, white on black prejudice was usually taken more seriously. When a group of Lithuanian communists proved unwilling to get in line with the party's campaign to expose racist tendencies and eliminate them, they learned the consequences. Party leaders understood black and white unity as a precondition for black liberation and socialist revolution. If they wanted to bring in the revolution, then communists had to publicly and actively promote black liberation and bring up those who refused on white chauvinist charges.³² Meanwhile, a small group with Strazdas – a member of *Vilnis's* editorial staff – as their leader, refused to take a stance against the fight to keep blacks out in the white, ethnic neighbourhood of Bridgeport. They also thought that an editorial against racism in Detroit was too harsh, and they defended the Lithuanian workers' co-operative against accusations that it supported racist policies. Strazdas was annoyed that the party so openly questioned him and his Lithuanian comrades, believing that such questions 'should have been settled among ourselves [the Lithuanians]'. Party leaders formally expelled Strazdas, an action which he largely ignored as he continued doing party work.³³

Although the CPUSA removed highly visible racist ethnic leaders such as Strazdas from their membership rolls, other examples of racist attitudes among language group members persisted within party ranks. A letter to the *Daily Worker* from P. Camel, a concerned black party member, dealt with racism among the party's white ethnics. Russian comrades in the city cancelled a party social occasion because, according to Camel, a few black communists planned to attend. The Russians knew better than to use black attendance as the reason for the cancellation and instead claimed that they feared a police shutdown of their Mutual Aid Society building, where they held a school for Russian children.³⁴ Such action resulted in the party losing six new black recruits.

Sam Ptasek, a Russian party veteran of ten years, became the scapegoat and, after appearing before an open trial arguing that his bad English was the cause of the mishap, he was expelled in the autumn of 1933 'with the right for readmission after six months'. By May 1934, Ptasek was reinstated; his fellow comrades unanimously supported his application. While it is possible that Ptasek rid himself of racist beliefs, he probably did not. More likely is that others in his group shared his views and supported cancelling the dance but were never brought up for charges.³⁵

In the context of a rigidly segregated city where race relations were generally bad, white ethnics who challenged racial mores had their work cut out.³⁶ Party leaders hoped that their white ethnic members would rise to this challenge, and they did make examples of people such as Ptasek when cases became public. But sometimes lower-ranking party leaders refused to report violations, allowing some of Chicago's communists to keep their racist attitudes below the higher-ranking leaders' radar.

Racism endured among some communist groups because party leaders largely focused their attention away from them. It was not that the city's party leaders did not care about the character of their ethnic members, but they were even more concerned with recruiting native-born industrial workers, which meant that language work in particular got short shrift. Charles Karenic's experience organizing as a Slovak machinist and a member of the Slovak Workers' Society supports this observation. Karenic, a former member of the city's Socialist Party, joined the CPUSA in June 1925. Knowing he had worked in industry since he was 12, party leaders encouraged Karenic to help them organize there. Karenic willingly extended his party activism to industry while continuing to work with fellow fraction members in his Slovak Workers' Society to bring new recruits to the CPUSA. These fractions, consisting of party members who worked together in mass organizations to voice communist policies and positions, were the party's life-line to all of its mass organizations.³⁷ Despite this fact, party leaders prioritized and praised Karenic's willingness to organize in industry more than they did his essential foreign language work among working people for whom English was a second language. Steve Nelson recalled: 'we had a lot of autonomy in our work in the [ethnic] lodges, for the main attention of both the district and national leadership of the Party was toward the trade union work'.³⁸ Such autonomy meant that party leaders were unable (and perhaps unwilling) to stamp out the various strands of non-compliance in their ranks.

With Chicago's party leaders offering more lip service in keeping ethnic communists in line than actual supervision and oversight, it was up to Zinich and others on the city's language buro to oversee the daily checking up and supervision of ethnic work. But three to five people could not handle the work alone, especially when, in Zinich's estimation, 'many Party officials are not considering this [language] work as important'.³⁹ The result was that subcultures were allowed to coexist within the Chicago party.

As party leaders diverted ethnic members into general party work, more isolated and independent language groups were left behind. In July 1934, members of the Scandinavian fraction complained about the way Chicago's party leaders raided their fraction, assigning their members to work among the unemployed, unions and other non-language party work, leaving nobody to carry out fraction work in the Danish-Norwegian Karl Marx Club. 'The anarchistic method now exercised by sections, units, etc., in the appointments of comrades to other duties must stop for the good of the movement.' The authors noted that the few communists who remained active in language work had party responsibilities heaped on them. Many became overwhelmed, inactive and the subject of talk among non-party club members who began to question communists' leadership skills.⁴⁰

Such realities meant that leadership was a general problem for ethnic communists. Bill Gebert, Chicago's leading party functionary, had himself been plucked from the Polish buro, leaving a glaring hole that the party found impossible to fill. One report from the language buro stated that the Yugoslav buro was 'politically clear' but had 'little forces left'. John Mackovich, leader of the party's Czechoslovaks in Chicago, had more troubling problems; his small number of leaders were politically uncertain at best, and yet he counselled caution when disciplining them:

I advise the greatest tact with dealing with their unCommunist stand. They are loyal workers of the Communist Party ... At present it would be very hard to fill the place of anyone. The lack of leadership is a very burning issue in our fraction. The two speakers what we have, are not much closer to the line of our Party than the socialist. The worst thing is that they have a real following in the mass organization. The workers naturally believe them to be the best Communists.⁴¹

With a scarcity of trustworthy leaders, communists expressed independence. When city buro and language leaders demanded that

comrade Hohol – business manager of the Ukrainian Labor Home and manager of its soda fountain store – stay in his position, Hohol refused and resigned. Another competent party manager took over the home, but the soda fountain store – a party headquarters of sorts, where communists left literature and made phone calls – was sold to a non-party member. City leaders agreed that Hohol did not ‘understand discipline’; yet Hohol’s blatant disregard of party direction only resulted in his being ‘severely criticized’ and ‘warned’ that he must ‘become subject to Party discipline at all times’. In another case, J. Semashko – member of a Polish fraction and Unemployed Council – found that his fellow comrades filed numerous complaints against him. A report reads that Semashko ignores his unit leaders, ‘styles himself as an “Old Bolshevik”’, and thinks himself ‘above’ them. In one instance, he led a group of unemployed workers to an eviction without any plan. City leaders agreed that his actions had created a problem, but not one big enough for expulsion or even suspension. In the end, Semashko was simply ‘criticized for the attitude and action he has taken’.⁴² In these cases, the decision not to expel left behind individuals who wilfully defied the rules.

In addition to individual resistance, entire foreign language fractions marched to their own tune. In 1930, organization director John Williamson counted approximately 60 language fractions in the city. He labelled their functioning ‘still insufficient and in some cases weak’.⁴³ His negative appraisal was justified. The South Slavic fraction faced a wide field of possibility with more than 200,000 workers in ethnic organizations and a majority of those employed in mass industry, but communist fractions were disorganized, did not support party campaigns among South Slavic workers and did not promote the party paper, *Radnik*.⁴⁴ The Yugoslavs in particular did not understand fraction work and had to be reminded that communists ‘are not in these mass organizations to take up the inner questions but to connect them up with the problems of the class struggle’.⁴⁵ The South Slavs were not alone. The Lettish buro reported that its fractions were ‘functioning very weakly; are not taking a real hold of Party campaigns, and are losing membership instead of gaining it’.⁴⁶ Lithuanian communists were not active in general party work and, in Gebert’s words, refused to ‘carry on real Communist work in the mass organizations’.⁴⁷ As late as 1935, Polish fractions also were reported to be ‘functioning very badly, meeting irregularly’, and not providing ‘real political leadership’.⁴⁸

Chicago’s ethnic party members shared problems with those elsewhere. Harvey Klehr found that across the country, ‘foreign-language

groups, which monopolized many members' time and energy, were insular and inward looking'. In a 1930 organization conference, CPUSA leaders in Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania lamented the exclusiveness of their language groups. Some were afraid of outsiders, while others were simply more comfortable working with their own. Regardless, party leaders had a hard time getting their foreign language-speaking members to extend their interests into non-language work.⁴⁹

In general, Zinich reported, Chicago's foreign language-speaking communists were active in language organizations, but violated the third period's revolutionary spirit. He saw these tendencies as part of larger 'right-wing' problems that language members needed to 'liquidate'. Examples included fractions that were 'afraid to come openly as a fraction but hid themselves and in that way lose the respect of the progressive workers who have much confidence in the Party'. They also included ethnic communists who were 'afraid to insult the feelings of non-progressive workers [in mass organizations] with Communist speeches, motions, literature, press, or with politics'. Some foreign language communists even argued that 'fraternal societies usually are non-political'.⁵⁰ Perhaps these 'right-wing' behaviours were why some foreign language-speaking communists were so well respected in non-party groups. Regardless, they signalled to party leaders that their ethnic comrades did not accept third period policies. Not only were foreign language-speaking communists occasionally unwilling to carry out party campaigns in non-party organizations, but they were also unwilling to participate in section committees or unit meetings. This compartmentalization concerned city and national leaders, especially when it came to financial matters. City and national leaders hoped for loans and financial support from foreign language buros for party campaigns. Chicago's foreign language leaders assigned a person from each language buro to attend ethnic affairs and bring back 10 per cent of the earnings for the party. This person was also assigned to '[get] a list of sympathizers and ... well to do people who can be approached for donations'.⁵¹ Language groups were also expected to support the party nationally. When the Czechoslovakian buro had lapsed in their support, the district suggested that John Mackovich 'take off part of the pay of Party members who are employed by our organizations and give that to the center, as many other buros had done'.⁵² More often than not, city and national leaders found themselves scolding language groups for their refusal to support campaigns and comply with financial directives.

The party leaned on language groups for money in part because finances were bad throughout the city's organization. Beginning in 1929, Chicago's city leaders complained that the local party organization could no longer exist on a 'shoestring' as it had in the past. Paid functionaries often did not receive their paltry salaries and the party could not pay for the number of organizers it needed. On a more practical level, money was often unavailable for basic necessities. Unable to afford mimeograph machines for their units, communists fought over workspace in the party's trade union office.⁵³

Communist leaders hoped that the sale of ethnic newspapers would raise awareness among workers about party causes and lead to their support. But they found that ethnic editors, like foreign language communists more generally, were not always willing to follow the line set out for them. In one of his examinations of language papers in the city, Zinich found that 'most of our language papers are not conducting Party campaigns especially against the right danger in the language fractions, as they should'. He reported to Alpi, national language leader, that some fractions like the Armenian, Greek and Spanish did not even know about language directives. He reported that others are of the opinion that 'they can passively reject such articles because they are afraid of "undermining" the paper' or, more simply, because 'the editors do not agree with them'.⁵⁴

Instead of party directives, the contents of party papers reflected the interests of foreign language-speaking members. The Ukrainian newspaper printed a thesis that did not mention the CPUSA's Trade Union Unity League or the Worker's International Relief organization, but did include a discussion of party comrades concerning an international Ukrainian Emigration Congress. Zinich doubted 'whether the [Central Executive Committee] knows anything about this thesis'.⁵⁵ While the Ukrainian comrades debated an international congress, Polish communists printed advertisements from religious publications and for 'capitalist candidates for mayor in the city of Hamtranck'. When called on this lapse of good communist acumen, Kowalski, the paper's editor, stated that he simply disagreed.⁵⁶ Ethnic papers also balked when asked to lend money to the party. In one case, members associated with *Rovnost Ludu* agreed that they could not give the party money while their paper was in such a bad condition.⁵⁷

What this incident and others like it suggest is that communist party control was never unilateral and always had to be negotiated with particular personalities. Even when communist leaders had the power to relieve editors like Kowalski, which they did when he continually

proved politically unreliable, they still decided to keep him on the party's membership roles. Gebert, for one, always believed Kowalski could be 'saved', suggesting there remained a place in the party for people who strayed.⁵⁸

Conclusion

During the third period, the Chicago party successfully held together and built upon a group of otherwise loosely affiliated activists, and did so with a limited ability to micro-manage, decide and direct. Chicago communists built on local, leftist cultures and developed their own enclaves that dotted the city's working-class neighbourhoods. In some important cases, individuals followed the historical trajectory of radicalism in America and moved to the party after stints in other leftist organizations. They brought with them a commitment to workers' revolution and lots of other political baggage. Rather than a unified and completely Stalinized movement, local records show the difficulty that disciplined party members had in getting others to follow even, and sometimes especially, when those others were seasoned radicals.

At the local level, a wide variety of communists co-existed in Chicago. Some, even among the lowest-ranking members, were 'Stalinized', but they organized and socialized with communists who were not. When working in a community with as many neighbourhoods, industries and ethnic groups as Chicago, the party encountered all kinds of people, with various priorities and interests. The Soviet Union and communist policy mattered a great deal to these people, but neither precluded their acting in ways that also made sense in their local union, community or club meetings. The international communist movement was centred in Moscow, ruled by Stalin and governed by Leninist principles. But these facts still leave much of the story of the communist experience in a place like Chicago untold.

Notes

- 1 T. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (New York: Viking, 1960), p. 440.
- 2 B. D. Palmer, 'Rethinking the Historiography of United States Communism', *American Communist History*, 2, 2 (2003), 171. See also H. Klehr, J. E. Haynes and F. I. Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); H. Klehr, J. E. Haynes and K. M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); V. Pedersen, *The Communist Party in Maryland*,

- 1919–57 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001); J. E. Haynes and H. Klehr, 'The Historiography of American Communism: An Unsettled Field', *Labour History Review*, 68, 1 (2003), 61–78.
- 3 For examples of revisionist interpretation, see S. Nelson, J. R. Barrett and R. Ruck, *Steve Nelson: American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981); M. Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993); F. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); M. Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983); R. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).
- 4 For archive details, see R. Storch, 'Moscow's Archives and the New History of the Communist Party of the United States', *Perspectives* (October 2000), 44–50; J. E. Haynes, 'The American Communist Party Records on Microfilm', *Continuity*, 26 (2003), 21–6.
- 5 R. Storch, "'The Realities of the Situation': Revolutionary Discipline and Everyday Political Life in Chicago's Communist Party, 1928–35', *Labor: Studies in Working Class History in the Americas*, 1, 3 (2004), 9–44.
- 6 In Chicago, foreign language-speaking members provide just one example. The same can be said for African Americans, women, students and trade unionists. See R. Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at its Grassroots, 1928–35* (University of Illinois Press, 2007).
- 7 Storch, "'The Realities'", 9–44.
- 8 T. Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1957), p. 14.
- 9 S. De Leon, *American Labor Who's Who* (New York: Hanford, 1925); Interview with Vittorio Vidali, *Oral History of the American Left* (New York: New York University, n.d. [1984]); Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, pp. 127–30; Glazer, *The Social Basis*, pp. 13–46.
- 10 Interview with Vidali, p. 17.
- 11 Nelson et al., *Steve Nelson*, p. 66.
- 12 Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), Abern to Lovestone, 9 December 1925, f. 515/1/556, l. 61; Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, pp. 154–7 and 190–2; Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, pp. 135–7.
- 13 Abern to Lovestone, 9 December 1925; Glazer, *The Social Basis*, p. 52; Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, pp. 186–8.
- 14 Abern to Lovestone, 9 December 1925.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 RGASPI, 'Situation in Chicago', n.d. [1925], f. 515/1/556, ll. 75, 76.
- 17 Ibid; RGASPI, Abern to Lovestone, 14 November 1925, f. 515/1/2464, ll. 93–104.
- 18 RGASPI, 'Party Registration – 1931', f. 515/1/2464, l. 93; United States Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume 3, Part 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 636–40.
- 19 It is possible that Poles were over-represented as well, but impossible to know how many identified themselves under the category 'Jewish' rather

than 'Polish'. The largest groups in Chicago missing from party categories were the Irish and the Swedes. Given the Swedes' importance to the party, most likely a large percentage of the miscellaneous category included them. The lack of Irish participation is more difficult to explain. Of those members born in another country, 64 per cent were citizens of the US. See 'Party Registration – 1931'. Klehr states that the 1931 registration of the party showed that half of the immigrant members were citizens and two-thirds of the party were foreign-born. In Chicago, fewer were foreign-born comparatively and more (66 per cent) were citizens. See H. E. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 162. See also Glazer, *The Social Basis*, pp. 38–89, for comparative national party figures.

- 20 The category 'Jewish' does not appear in the 1930 census. However, according to Irving Cutler, in 1931 approximately 16 per cent of Chicago's population was composed of foreign-born Jews. He estimated that 45 per cent of the Jewish population of 300,000 were foreign-born. See I. Cutler, *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), pp. 126–7.
- 21 The figure for the percentage of Chicago's party members who fit in this category is based on party registration information provided by the district committee. They indicated 892 foreign-born members were active in Chicago's district, but only listed numbers for the 'most important nationalities'. See RGASPI, 'Party Registration – 1931'.
- 22 L. Wirth and M. Furez, *Local Community Fact Book, 1938* (Chicago: Chicago Recreation Commission, 1938), pp. 24–31; RGASPI, District Organization Department Letter, f. 515/1/2113; 15 September 1930 and 15 December 1930, 1/41/2113, l. 82; 13 September 1932, 1/2882, l. 144.
- 23 RGASPI, District Organization Letter, 15 September 1930; Hathaway to Bedacht, 17 October 1929, d/1652, ll. 121–23; M. Cygan, 'The Polish-American Left', and M. Woroby, 'The Ukrainian Immigrant Left in the United States', in P. Buhle and D. Georgakas (eds.), *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 148–206; E. R. Kantowicz, *Polish-American Politics in Chicago, 1888–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).
- 24 RGASPI, 'Party Registration – 1931'; District Organization Department Meeting, 9 November 1932, f. 515/1/2882, l. 169; District Organization Department, 12 April 1933 and 29 June 1933, 1/3258, l. 131 and 141. See also P. Buhle, 'Themes in American Jewish Radicalism', in Buhle and Georgakas (eds.), *The Immigrant Left*, pp. 77–118; P. Buhle, 'Jews and American Communism: The Cultural Question', *Radical History Review* 23 (Spring, 1980), 9–36; Cutler, *The Jews of Chicago*, pp. 233–8; Glazer, *The Social Basis*, pp. 130–44.
- 25 RGASPI, Minutes of the Lithuanian Central Buro, 16 October 1931, f/5/1/2532; Borich to Yugoslav Buro, n.d, f. 515/1/2021, l. 64.
- 26 RGASPI, S. Zinich, 'The Right Wing Danger in Foreign Language Organizations and Our Tasks', pp. 11–16, f. 515/1/1816, ll.
- 27 S. Zinich uses this term to describe this problem in 'The Right Wing Danger'. Theodore Draper discusses the role of foreign-language federations in the leftist battles that eventually led to the formation of the CPUSA in *The Roots of American Communism*.

- 28 RGASPI, Letter to Hathaway, n.d, f. 515/1/1683, l. 73.
- 29 RGASPI, Letter to Finnish Buro, 1933 f. 515/1/3265, l. 273; Hathaway to Kruse, 12 August 1929, f. 515/1/1652, ll. 100–09.
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15

The Profintern and the 'Syndicalist Current' in the United States

Edward P. Johanningsmeier

Political movements develop a certain momentum that is uniquely sustained by discourse and other cultural synergies, as well as compelled by the usual instruments of organizational and material influence. It should be useful, therefore, to trace certain themes in the diverse oppositional culture of American communism as a way of finding out more about the movement as a whole and its influence on American life. Culture in this sense is primarily a way of characterizing the world-views of the adherents of a particular political movement – the ways in which they organized the memory of their concrete experiences so that there is some commonality and cohesiveness of perception. These common perceptions, traceable in part through language, idiom and myth, in turn help to establish a template for action at a collective level.

One area of consensus among historians of the American communist movement, whether 'revisionist' or 'traditionalist', has been that the Bolshevik Revolution was the most powerful operating paradigm for the various individuals who early on formed the organizations that became the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA).¹ There remains an incompleteness, however, in analysing the birth of the CPUSA and the forging of its collective identity as based primarily on the Bolshevik Revolution. Because many of the most dedicated and persistent party members declared that they were quite powerfully influenced by the example of the revolution, it is tempting to collaborate in minimizing their own biographical particularities; for instance, identities of race, ethnicity and gender, or previous political affiliations and traditions. Yet, the 'forgetting' that is required in order for a series of events in a very foreign locale to determine a person's political disposition, if we assume that actions have a certain basis in memory and

culture, is only possible if one employs a mechanistic idea of the radical mentality, and an unacceptably simplistic conception of the formation and influence of political movements. 'Stalinism' is one example of a presumably rather monolithic political phenomenon that has recently been given more dimension by a number of careful social, economic and cultural histories. At the level of biography, the potential for non-functionalist, non-instrumental histories of Stalinism is perhaps most suggestive. Arguably, it is through examination of multivalent 'communist lives' that one might explain the phenomenon of change in the Stalinist milieu most convincingly. This includes the 'countless individual reforms by which the communist becomes the ex-communist'.²

Origins

The complicated journeys of individual American radicals to and from communism and 'Stalinism' can be analysed in part by examining one thread in American radical culture that many communists held in common: radical unionism or, in the parlance of the time, syndicalism. This 'ism' was a topic of intense discussion within and without the pre-First World War left in the United States. Far from representing an abstract or alien ideology, the term seemed to embody the exceptional strength and growth of American industrial unionism at the time. A sympathetic commentator, William English Walling, observed that 'the public and a large part of the working class are employing the word syndicalism'.³ Theodore Draper considered pre-war syndicalism, along with left-wing socialism, to be one of the key influences in the biographies of the founding members of the communist movement in the US. In *The Roots of American Communism* (1957), he relied in part on narratives by Alexander Bittelman and James P. Cannon, individuals who were closely involved in factions centring on radical unionism. According to Bittelman, the communist party began its life 'permeated with industrialism and revolutionary syndicalism'.⁴ However, a significant fracture point in Draper's histories is that they do not elaborate how the experiences of various syndicalist-communists resonated in the later history of the party, beyond illustrating that the syndicalist infusion afforded the party a transient *entrée* into non-communist enterprises like the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Farmer-Labor Party movements. 'Syndicalist' was nearly always a harsh epithet in the communist lexicon; thus, Cannon and Bittelman understandably used the term quite cautiously in

describing continuities in their own politics. In keeping with his thesis of Communist International (Comintern) control and dominance, Draper's history portrays the syndicalist inflection on communist policy in the 1920s as minimal.

When a cohort of radicals with union organizing experience rose to influence within the American communist movement beginning in 1921, their activism was informed not only by Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism* (1920), but also by their experiences in the strike movements of the war years. They had been involved at one time or another with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), DeLeonite, French, English and even business-union syndicalism. A certain cadre style began to assert itself, and this was remarked on in many of the remembrances of the party's founders. These communists considered themselves 'radical regulars', as labour economist David Saposs termed them. They believed that they were contributing a hard-headed, realistic outlook to the communist movement, which they felt was overly influenced either by immigrants with little experience of 'American conditions' and American workers, or by utopian 'Wobblies' who still clung to the illusion that American workers could be organized into revolutionary unions.⁵ Proud of their proletarian or union *bona fides*, this cohort occasionally took on a crude 'workerist', anti-intellectual tone that alienated others with more complicated class identities. There were resonances of the syndicalist cult of pure subjectivity and action, disdainful of the verbiage and 'talk' of socialist theory. Politics tended to be antecedent and *post-hoc*; action came before ideological justification.

Although many recent histories of American communism have focused on the party's clandestine connections with the Soviet Union and its espionage work, it is important to recognize that for the American party, the trade union movement was from the early 1920s onward the area of concentration to which its members gave by far their greatest emphasis and energy. William Foster, James Cannon, Earl Browder and the leader of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), Solomon Lozovsky, were vital in developing a certain kind of oppositional and factional culture within the party that was generally syndicalist in character.

In tracing the origins of the syndicalist current in American communism, one crucial resource is the archives of the RILU (also known as the Red Trade Union International (RTUI) and commonly referred to as the Profintern). For many communists in various national labour movements, the Profintern, based in Moscow, was an important

source of organizational support and ideological guidance, as well as a forum for meaningful debate over tactics. The most important recent study of the Profintern, by Reiner Tosstorff, is premised on the fact that 'the formation of many communist parties cannot be explained without reconstructing the way in which they built a mass base in the organized working class, i.e., in the trade union movement', and that this development in turn took place in large part under the aegis of the Profintern and its national affiliates. 'The RILU', according to Tosstorff, 'was the original meeting point for syndicalists and Bolsheviks', and a neglect of the history of the RILU has resulted in an underestimation of 'the contribution of syndicalism as the second root of international communism'.⁶ Another historian, Wayne Thorpe, has emphasized the potential of the syndicalist movement as the largest anti-authoritarian current in international radicalism in the years just before and after 1917.⁷ Important figures in national communist movements whose careers began and/or were sustained through their work inside the RILU include Harry Pollitt, William Z. Foster, Earl Browder, George Hardy, Alfred Rosmer and Jack Murphy. Tosstorff, however, argues that a 'separate syndicalist current within the RILU ceased to exist after its second congress (1922). The RILU became a unitary, politically homogeneous organization.'⁸

This chapter will suggest that the 'syndicalist current' of activists remained a diverse, relatively autonomous and incompressible factor in the CPUSA through the 1920s and into the period of Stalinization of the international movement. The Profintern began to factor into the calculations of American communists soon after its founding in 1921. As Cannon remembered of his participation on the RILU executive committee in 1922, while general political questions were co-ordinated with and decided by the Comintern, the Profintern 'enjoyed a wide autonomy ... in all practical affairs of the international trade union movement'.⁹ Draper later observed that in party affairs, 'the "trade union communists" and the "political communists" often vied for party leadership. If the trade unionists temporarily lost out they could take refuge in the Profintern apparatus until they were ready to stage a comeback'.¹⁰

Lozovsky

The head of the Profintern throughout its existence was Solomon Lozovsky. Lozovsky is a particularly interesting figure because he illus-

trates the connection between an indigenous, historically-specific syndicalist current in the United States and the 'Stalinized' Comintern.

Lozovsky possessed astonishing stamina in the world of high-level Soviet politics. He was a veteran Bolshevik who joined the Marxist underground in Russia in 1901 and had known Lenin and Stalin personally since 1905. A former blacksmith from a small town in the Ukraine, he became acquainted with French syndicalism as the leader of a General Confederation of Labour (*Confédération générale du travail*; CGT) hat-makers union during a period of exile in Paris beginning in 1908. During his long career, except for brief periods in 1917 and 1938–39, he managed to remain at or near the highest level of the Soviet *apparatus*. He was arrested in Moscow in 1949 for alleged Zionist plotting, and was executed in 1952.¹¹ In a recently uncovered transcript of his interrogation, Lozovsky discussed his brief expulsion from the Bolsheviks in 1917 for his strong opposition to the idea of state control of the trade union movement. The trade unions, he asserted at the time, had to be built 'from the bottom up'.¹²

Lozovsky was from the beginning deeply involved in attempts by the Bolsheviks and the Comintern to win the allegiance of European syndicalists. There were obvious affinities between syndicalism and Leninism. Many syndicalists were drawn to the Bolsheviks by the formation of factory committees in the period of the revolution, and by the publication of Lenin's *State and Revolution*, written in 1917 and available in the West in 1919. Here, Lenin excoriated the gradualist tactics of pre-war social democrats, and at first emphasized that the revolutionary, proletarian dictatorship would be only transitional. However, a number of histories have offered compelling descriptions of the increasing alienation of many European syndicalists from the increasingly authoritarian Soviet state in the early 1920s, and their adamant opposition to the Profintern's formal declarations that political and economic struggle could not be logically separate in any effective revolutionary movement in the trade unions.¹³

Despite the Soviet state's brutal repression of Russian anarchist and syndicalist movements and its embrace of centralized economic planning by political authorities, a significant number of syndicalists remained closely affiliated with the Profintern through its early years, including Rosmer, Tom Mann and, in the United States, William Z. Foster and a significant cohort of Wobblies. Many syndicalists were compelled to join the RILU simply by the logic of proletarian solidarity with the Bolshevik Revolution and the vanguard Russian communists. The fact that the Profintern was recognized as a nominally separate

entity after its first congress was considered by a number of syndicalists to be a major concession, since the Russian communists had wanted to place the international trade union body within the Comintern apparatus itself. Lozovsky was most energetic and persuasive in recruiting the syndicalists, however. He ridiculed the traditional syndicalist emphasis on a strict separation of political and economic struggle. 'All class struggle is political struggle', he declared in 1921; pre-war syndicalist thought was fundamentally flawed by its inability to discern the 'politics of the economy'. The decisive influence of the state in both helping implement and repressing organizing campaigns in the war and post-war years was especially obvious to American radical unionists.¹⁴

Strategies

In the United States, the Bolshevik turn to a united front after 1921 and Lenin's publication of *Left-Wing Communism* led to a search for ways to gain influence in the AFL. Lozovsky and the Profintern recruited William Z. Foster, a pre-war syndicalist who had helped initiate large AFL organizing campaigns in the meatpacking and steel industries during the war. Foster attended the first Profintern congress in 1921, where he was in the company of many of the leading figures in European syndicalism, and Lozovsky was instrumental in negotiating the terms of Foster's relationship with the early communist party. Lozovsky placed Foster in charge of the party's industrial work, apparently without consultation of the other party leaders. Foster's Trade Union Educational League (TUEL) became the focus for communist activities in the unions in the 1920s.¹⁵

At the founding congresses of the communist movement in Chicago in 1919, very few in attendance had had any connection with or practical knowledge of the American labour movement, despite the fact that Chicago had been the site of unprecedented labour organizing campaigns during the war. Many members of the early communist party were foreign-born socialists, and a small number of English-speaking left wingers; many early communists were favourable to the ideas of the IWW, and Draper has pointed out the ideological influence towards 'mass action' in the early communist party, derived in part from the Dutch anarcho-syndicalist theorists Anton Pannekoek and Herman Gorter. Nonetheless, sponsored heavily by the Profintern, it was the 'boring-from-within' syndicalism typified by Foster and others that provided the basis for a wide range for communist activism in the labour movement before 1929.¹⁶

Several documents in the Comintern and Profintern archives help illuminate some of the issues involved in the establishment of the Profintern's new section in the US, the TUEL. A letter signed in Moscow during the Profintern's first congress by Earl Browder, who had helped persuade Foster to join the movement and was his newly appointed special assistant, and William D. Haywood, the exiled IWW leader, states that 'in case of disagreement between the American Bureau of the RILU and the CPA the party decision prevails until final decision from Moscow'.¹⁷ Another document, addressed to James Cannon as 'special representative of the RILU in the US', states that 'your work in the United States will be to follow STRICTLY the principles and general policies laid down by the Congress of the RILU'.¹⁸ Interestingly, Foster signed neither of the documents. Perhaps most significant is a document sent by the leadership of the American party to the ECCI in 1921 which refers to a 'secret' resolution approved in Moscow by a 'Commission on Relations between the Comintern and the Profintern'. This resolution stated that 'the work of the Bureau established in any country by the RTUI shall not at any time conflict with or encroach upon the work of the CP in the same country', and that 'on all bureau established by the RTUI, the CP of the same country shall have adequate representation with decisive vote. Where disagreement arises between the party and the bureau, the position of the party shall prevail, pending appeal to and decision by the CEC [Central Executive Committee] of the CI [Comintern]'.¹⁹ Obviously feeling uneasy about the new Profintern bureau in the US, the letter specifically requests that the resolution be formally recognized as applying to the unnamed 'special representative' of the RILU in America.

Despite the behind-the-scenes 'secret' resolutions cited above, by the time of the convening of the second RILU congress in November 1922, the French United General Confederation of Labour (*Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire*; CGTU) was able to extract a formal concession it had demanded on the principle of its independence from Communist political discipline. Lozovsky emphasized openly at the time that party-trade union tactics could not be identical everywhere. In his path-breaking thesis on the Profintern, Albert Resis argued that the second congress, by yielding to the pressure of French syndicalists on these points, called into question the principle of the communist party's vanguard role. Lozovsky consulted Lenin on the advisability of yielding some formal independence to the syndicalists, and Lenin instructed him to make the adjustments.²⁰

Gaston Monmousseau wrote that he and his French comrades had gone to Moscow in 1921 'as syndicalists', but 'came back as Leninists'.²¹ Some anti-Soviet syndicalists formed a separate syndicalist international in 1922, the International Working Men's Association (IWMA). However, the IWMA never achieved much tangible influence in the European labour movement. By contrast, in the summer of 1922 the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD), using the Profintern as a vital organizational link to the unions, could claim the allegiance of one-third of the organized workforce. In 1922, the German party had established approximately 1,000 organized groups within the German trade unions. By 1923, unions supporting the Profintern represented about 2,500,000 workers or about half the workforce.²²

A highly developed elasticity in tactics was necessary in communist trade union work, according to Lenin. Indeed, Lenin held during this period that communists must be able 'to agree to any sacrifice, and even – if need be – to resort to all sorts of stratagems, artifices, illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, so as to get into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on communist work within them'.²³ In turn, relativism was at the core of the Profintern's strategic ethos, as one of Lozovsky's meditations on tactics makes clear: '[Everything] changes in accordance with time, place and circumstances', and communists working in the Profintern's ambit should rely always on a 'relativity of methods and means of struggle,' he maintained.²⁴ In one philippic that purported to explain Lenin's approach to the trade union movement to American communists, Lozovsky was unable to specify any consistent approach in Lenin's writings. Rather, he found examples of nearly every conceivable tactic or line in the already vast corpus of Lenin's books, pamphlets, resolutions and speeches. Depending on the exigency, there may be, properly, economism and political leadership; spontaneity and conscious vanguardism; affiliation of unions with the party and neutrality; 'spiritual leadership' versus 'organizational unity'; 'parallel action' versus 'close co-operation'; 'governmentalization' of unions after the revolution and/or socialized industry managed by trade unions and shop committees, to name only a few of the possible corrections and 'strategisms'. At one point, Lozovsky even characterized one tactic as having been, in retrospect, merely a 'strong, clearly Bolshevik deflection', as opposed to a 'clear cut, firm Bolshevik line'.²⁵ Here, in 1924, Lozovsky's analysis and polemical style prefigured the 'official centrism' (and surrealism) of full-fledged Stalinism.

Lozovsky's manoeuvring and rhetoric during the early years of the Profintern's existence are astonishing for their flexibility and presage his relative success, or at least longevity, in the hierarchy of the Russian party. It is worth speculating about Lozovsky's temperament and personality at this juncture in his career as a revolutionary. The test of communist leadership was in part a test of discipline and belief, what some have characterized as the ability to pursue diametrically opposed policies at different times as the exigencies of the party demand. Clearly, Lozovsky had had a great deal of experience with the 'locomotive' of revolutionary history years before the Bolshevik Revolution itself.

Theodore Draper once reflected on the idea that '[a] long-time communist is neither a revolutionary [n]or reformist; he has been both and everything in between'. He proposed that consequently, in the crucible of the party, there are both 'believers and those who pretend to believe'. The believers must carry the risks of disillusionment and alienation; the cynics 'believe in nothing in order that they may believe in everything'.²⁶ Following this schema, and given the basic facts of Lozovsky's statements and career, one would tend to class him as a radical sceptic. However, it may be added that the problem of belief is what renders Lozovsky modern and lends him a certain credibility as a personality that can be occasionally glimpsed beneath the rhetoric. In this case, how might one reliably distinguish between a devaluing cynicism and a more positive kind of praxis and opportunism? In his early career, what stands out besides his indefatigable manoeuvring and 'diplomatizing' was Lozovsky's ability to bring about, via the Profintern, the first tentative merging of Bolshevism with actual mass movements; specifically, the radical trade union and syndicalist organizations that had managed to maintain, in various forms, a degree of working-class empowerment following the First World War. Lozovsky's effectiveness consisted simultaneously in his own adamant Bolshevism, in synergy with the relative ecumenism he sought to re-create and infuse in the early Profintern.

Lozovsky's 'politics' consisted mostly of advancing general slogans about the necessary merging of political and economic struggle and the ultimate necessity of communist leadership in the RILU. Only occasionally was he more interesting and transgressive. In a significant 1922 article on 'The Tasks of the Communists in the Labour Movement', he held that it was necessary in the affairs of the American party to maintain a functional separation between a relatively independent trade union cadre concerned with the 'immediate' demands of workers, and

the political wing of the party focused more on 'line' and ideology. He specifically pointed to the TUEL as an example of how communist influence was to be won in working-class organizations:

Influence in the working-class movement is secured neither by resolutions nor by certain successful decisions of the Central Executive Committee [of the Party], but by the work done by Communists in their respective labour organizations. We must, therefore, speak less, or, if you will, not at all about control of the activities of the TUEL, for such talk leads only to mechanical control, or rather an attempt at mechanical interference in work *which by its very nature the party can neither carry on nor accomplish*. [emphasis added]²⁷

The TUEL developed into a complex and decentralized undertaking. It did not have formal membership or charge dues, thereby avoiding accusations of 'dualism' and also, perhaps, to allay anxieties about associating with an organization that officially advocated recognition of the Soviet Union and the Profintern. Subscription to the official organ of the TUEL, the *Labor Herald*, constituted 'membership'. In its propaganda, the TUEL routinely called for union recognition of the RILU, but focused primarily on immediate demands and workplace governance. Its philosophy was consistent with some of the main currents of pre-war syndicalism in the United States, Great Britain and France. It embraced the concept of the militant minority and the idea of revolutionizing the conservative trade unions by 'boring from within'. It had correspondents in 14 'industrial groups' and 45–50 cities in the early 1920s.²⁸ The unifying programme of the TUEL was 'amalgamation' of existing unions into quasi-industrial union structures. The amalgamation idea had in various forms been advocated by union radicals and progressives in the US since the nineteenth century, and provided a solid platform for dissident movements which in turn advocated a variety of shop-floor and organizational causes in the 1920s, usually in conflict with the established business-union officialdom. The TUEL was able to found nuclei in dozens of different branches and at various levels of the trade union movement. The strongest and most numerous contingents were in the mining, machinists, railroads and garment unions. The amalgamation strategy survived numerous changes in the party's trade union line and, in the 1930s, ended up being an important basis for communist influence in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).²⁹

The persistence of a syndicalist impulse in the US through the 1920s is one subject of David Montgomery's influential studies on American

trade unionism and workers' control. In his classic formulation, Montgomery rejected the usual equation of AFL unionism with job consciousness or working-class conservatism, and instead traced a continuing syndicalist militancy into the 1920s among crafts workers in a number of industries.³⁰ More recently, Howard Kimmeldorf has extended and extrapolated from Montgomery's insights, arguing that many American workers, regardless of their affiliation with the IWW, AFL or, later, CPUSA, embraced an aggressive, practical, class-conscious syndicalism through the 1930s. The workers identified by Montgomery and Kimmeldorf were precisely the class-conscious cohort that the communists in the TUEL sought to recruit and organize in the early 1920s.³¹

The TUEL, as the 'industrial' branch of American communism in the 1920s, grew into a powerful influence that challenged the concept of 'political' control of the CPUSA by its executive committee. The significance of this challenge, as well as the continuity between the native American syndicalism of the pre-communist era and the activism of the TUEL in the 1920s, has been underestimated by historians who have focused on the Comintern's role in the party's development. Bertram Wolfe, who as a communist during the early period was deeply involved in the party's political apparatus, characterized the syndicalist tendencies revolving around the TUEL as the first expression of a native American 'exceptionalism' in the party's history.³² In early 1923, one not untypical report to the Comintern pointed to the sharp division between the political and industrial arms of the party, one based in New York and the other in Chicago. Foster, as head of the TUEL, 'has been given free hand and all facilities within the party placed at his disposal' in his attempts to steer the party toward an emphasis on trade union activism.³³ One persistent internal party critic wrote to Lozovsky that, according to communist theory and its resolutions, the CPUSA was supposed to control the TUEL, but it was, in fact, the TUEL that 'controls the industrial policy' of the CPUSA.³⁴ Lozovsky, who had recruited Foster into the communist movement, remained a strong supporter of the American syndicalist emphasis throughout the 1920s, and considered the TUEL 'his sphere of influence and its leaders his wards and agents'.³⁵

Red trade unions

The *sine qua non* of interpretations emphasizing the Stalinization of international communism focus on events of the late 1920s, specifically the radical 'left turn' of the Soviet party in the period

1927–28, the momentous sixth world congress of the Comintern in July–August 1928 where Stalin consolidated his power over his internal rivals, and the subsequent ‘third period’ theorization of the imminent collapse of capitalism – the embrace of which proved disastrous to European communist parties. In line with this interpretation, historians have characterized the Profintern as essentially moribund by the mid-1920s because of the expulsion of German communists from the union movement after 1923 and the creation of an Anglo-Russian Joint Advisory Council in Britain, which advocated bringing the communists into the reformist trade union international, the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). Yet the failure of the 1926 General Strike in Britain seemed to renew the promise of the Profintern as a distinct centre for a communist line in the labour movement. Stalin’s move to the left in 1927–28 seemed to require an apparatus for co-ordination and control of new communist unions in a variety of contexts.³⁶

Lozovsky’s early attitude to establishing new unions in the US suggests that he was not merely responding to Soviet politics in his encouragement of dual unionism. Although his shift to the left reflected in part the Comintern’s changing line on conditions in Britain, Lozovsky’s criticisms of American policy were apt and penetrating, based on a reasonable interpretation of conditions there.³⁷ In February 1927, months before the leftward shift in Moscow was formalized in 1928 at the Comintern ninth plenum, Lozovsky wrote to Foster that in handing over the large Passaic strike of textile workers in 1926 to the conservative AFL, he had suffered from a ‘fear of setting up and directing a union’ outside the trade union establishment.³⁸ With regard to failed communist efforts to take over the United Mine Workers that same year, Lozovsky wrote that ‘THE QUESTION OF SETTING UP AN INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION MUST BE RAISED’.³⁹ A number of prominent union organizers in the party offered compelling arguments that conditions in the US by the late 1920s seemed to demand the formation of new unions.⁴⁰

Beginning in 1928 and continuing even after Bukharin, the personification of the doomed ‘right danger’ in Moscow, persisted in attacking Lozovsky for tending to neglect work in the old unions, Profintern resolutions still provided a platform for organizers in the TUEL, now renamed the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), to operate in the old AFL unions.⁴¹ In the American context, the question of ‘boring-from-within’ versus ‘dual unionism’ may have been mostly rhetorical, as Kimmeldorf suggests in his comparative study of IWW, AFL and com-

munist unionism in the 1920s and 1930s. Each style of unionism could easily accommodate the American syndicalist emphasis on workers' control, or what he calls 'the distinctly *industrial* radicalism of American labor' or the essentially 'syndicalist pulse of the American working class'. According to Kimmeldorf, American workers' union allegiance was often more a formality than an accurate indication of workers' psychology. The common factor was class-conscious direct action, and avoiding what William Foster once termed 'high politics'.⁴² One organizer for the communist-controlled National Miners' Union (NMU), established in 1928, recounted his simple explanation of the 'class against class' line to a crowd of mineworkers in 1928:

I pointed to the fact that our new union was founded upon the class lines based on class consciousness, that we would never stop short of finally taking over the coal mines and all other basic industries and placing them in the hands of the toiling masses which was absolute communism.⁴³

The continuing existence of an openly syndicalist faction in the American party after the full emergence of the third period seemed to contradict the Stalinist emphasis on strict political control. Jay Lovestone, the faction leader of the self-designated 'politicals' in the party, told Stalin directly in 1928 that the group centred on Foster and the TUEL was merely 'a trade union bunch with opportunist inclinations', and that the political wing of the party was gradually assimilating them. In response to Lovestone's protests about Lozovsky's factionalism and the independence of the TUEL from the party executive committee, Stalin stated that such a situation was intolerable.⁴⁴ Foster himself often and openly complained about political interference in the work of the union-oriented cadre. In America, he said at one point, practically the only front on which the communists were making tangible progress was in the labour movement. Yet 'many comrades prefer to evade this struggle. It is much easier to go along with the general political work of the party.' In 1928, he complained about 'Greenwich villagers' taking over the CPUSA who wanted 'to make our party into a mere instrument for organizing a labor party'.⁴⁵

Despite Lozovsky's attacks on the party's trade union line in 1927–28, he remained a strong factional supporter of the union-oriented faction throughout the third period. At one meeting during the sixth world congress, he echoed the sentiments of the TUEL faction that the Lovestone supporters were mere dilettantes, and that there

were too many intellectuals: 'You cannot have a successful leadership with comrades who come right from the university without a stop in the factory', he lectured a group of American communists in Moscow.⁴⁶ Lovestone and many members of his group were expelled from the party in the aftermath of a special 'American Commission' in 1929, called to resolve the ongoing factional dispute. The issue for the Comintern at the time was primarily how to guarantee control of the Americans by the Soviet party. Nonetheless, it was significant that Lozovsky, head of the RILU, managed to keep his client interests in the US relatively intact throughout the third period.

In 1930, and specifically at the fifth Profintern congress in August, Lozovsky faced open questioning over the implementation of the third period line in Britain.⁴⁷ On another front, in February 1931 Foster informed Lozovsky that he was renewing communist cells in the non-communist unions in the US.⁴⁸ In a November article in the American communist press, Lozovsky quoted parts of resolutions of the fifth congress on the need to strengthen communist factions in the reformist unions; Foster in turn reminded Lozovsky that he had been establishing more of an organizational basis for such work. As for the new communist unions, Foster emphasized in intra-party councils that their primary purpose was to be as 'instruments of struggle to improve the immediate conditions of the workers'.⁴⁹

Beginning in May 1931, the communist dual union in the coalfields of Western Pennsylvania, the National Miners Union, led a large strike against wage cuts by the operators. By June some 40,000 workers were out in Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio and West Virginia. According to third period ideology, the party was to take open leadership of strikes; but in the Pittsburgh area, the NMU was only a background presence at first. Instead, communist organizers worked through an ad hoc united front of grievance and strike committees. The strike had disintegrated by early 1932 in the midst of severe repression.⁵⁰

However, a Comintern representative in the US reported to Moscow that Foster had openly disobeyed his instructions concerning the conduct of the strike. He observed that Foster and the miners' committees had virtually ignored the party and 'political work' during the strike, serving as 'mere' trade union functionaries among the workers and refusing to mention the party with 'even a single word'. In this situation, he asserted, the CPUSA was reduced to an adjunct to the union and its immediate demands. This constituted an open defiance of the third period line, and when the outraged representative directly intervened, Foster called a special conference of section organizers to con-

vince them that the Comintern representative's position constituted a 'left deviation'. The reasons for the eventual failure of this important strike are complex, but it was carried out largely according to Foster's designs, and it is now clear that he made no secret of his contempt for the pronouncements and manoeuvres of the American party leadership and the Comintern representative at the time. Approximately four years after Stalin had told Lovestone that the divisions in the party were intolerable, a Comintern representative in the US reported to Moscow that 'the separation of the so-called political and trade union activity is very strongly marked in the party'.⁵¹

Popular front

The Profintern was formally dissolved in the aftermath of the Comintern's seventh world congress in 1935. Georgi Dimitrov convinced Stalin of the Profintern's obsolescence in light of the requirements of the popular front in Europe. Soviet policy after 1935 was to seek international trade union unity by merging its national trade union affiliates with the social democratic IFTU.⁵² Despite the organizational demise of the Profintern, communists who had worked within its ambit continued to exercise a profound influence in the CPUSA.

Perhaps the most significant instance of union cadre unruliness and 'syndicalism' occurred in 1937, at a vital juncture in the history of the CPUSA and the industrial union movement in the US. In order to maintain the party's popular front alliance with John L. Lewis and the leadership of the CIO, Earl Browder and his adjuncts in the communist leadership sought to suppress the unauthorized sit-down strikes of car workers in Detroit that occurred from March through November. These strikes were particularly significant because they revolved around the explosive issue of shop floor authority. The strikes also raised the question of the extent to which communist organizers would assist the CIO and the new United Auto Workers' (UAW) union in disciplining its members and establishing its credibility with General Motors.⁵³

It is now clear that during this period, Foster initiated a full-scale, behind-the-scenes attack on Browder and his conduct of the popular front in the US. In Moscow, Foster derided Browder and the CPUSA hierarchy for their diffidence, and for simply 'tailing' after John L. Lewis and the New Deal labour coalition centred on Franklin D. Roosevelt rather than working to establish more of an identity for

the party as a champion of the workers' 'immediate' demands on the shop floor. He was incensed that the party leadership had deferred far too easily to electoral politics in the steel organizing campaign of 1936, and expressed the view of many in the party that communists could have organized more effectively for the 'Little Steel' strike of 1937, but instead merely assumed Lewis and Roosevelt would somehow prevail in the struggle.⁵⁴

Foster and William Weinstone, the party chairman in Detroit, initially supported the sit-down strikes in 1937, or at least refused to criticize them at a time when the UAW had come under intense journalistic scrutiny for harbouring communists in its ranks. At an enlarged Politbureau meeting of the CPUSA in November, with approximately 80 party leaders present, Foster duly pointed out the dangers the strike posed to the party and endorsed a rationale for ending the strikes or at least the party's association with them. However, it is a measure of Foster's contempt for formal CPUSA procedure and pronouncements that a few days later Weinstone and Bill Gebert, the leading organizers under him in the auto union, 'carried out the exact opposite of the decision, and instead ... initiated a fight in the [UAW] executive for the legalization of the strikes as a precondition for their ending', according to Browder. Browder, convinced that Foster was behind the rebellion despite his gestures of neutrality, accused him of insubordination and eventually told him that a vote for the removal of Weinstone had to include his assent. 'Comrade Foster responded in an extremely subjective manner, such as we have not had in our party leadership for many years'. Browder, appearing at yet another 'American Commission' in Moscow in January 1938, termed Foster's actions a 'basic challenge to the conduct of our party'.⁵⁵ In his statements in Moscow, in the midst of Stalin's terror, Browder acknowledged his and the CPUSA's debt to Foster as an indispensable organizer, but nonetheless accused Foster of common purpose with Trotskyist and socialist dissenters in the auto union who opposed the popular front. Dimitrov, secretary of the Comintern, sternly rebuked Foster for sectarianism, for his fear of 'going to the masses, particularly of going into the petty-bourgeois masses, of going forward together with the Democratic and Republican progressive elements'.⁵⁶ Foster returned from Moscow chastened, and Weinstone was later removed as district organizer. However, the debate in Moscow had been largely *post-facto*; the most important on-the-ground decisions regarding the communists' relation to the wildcat strikes had already been made in the United States.

Conclusions

Solomon Lozovsky, after a period of uncertainty in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Profintern, managed to re-establish his career in another line of government altogether. In 1939, he was chosen by Molotov to be one of three deputy commissars for foreign affairs, a post he held until 1946. He distinguished himself during the Second World War as vice-chairman of the Soviet Information Bureau, which was charged with dealing with the foreign press. In addition, Lozovsky was a particularly effective organizer and advocate for the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), founded in 1942 by renowned actor and theater director Solomon Mikhoels. The JAC played an important part in the Soviet war effort through its fundraising in the West and propaganda promoting Soviet alliances with the democracies. However, it all 'counted for nothing', as Khrushchev later recounted in his memoirs. Lozovsky was arrested at the beginning of a series of vicious anti-Semitic purges in 1949, and executed in Lubyanka prison in August of 1952, charged with participating in a plot to 'tear away the Crimea' for the creation of a Jewish homeland.⁵⁷

Lozovsky's biographical details are particularly tragic and suggestive in light of the question of the relationship between 'trade union communists' in the international movement, whom he supervised for so many years, and Stalinism. At the inception of his career in the international labour movement, Lozovsky's base of power in the Soviet party depended to a certain extent on the essentially syndicalist concept of 'independence' of union-based cadre from political control, and he expressed this view to an American visitor as late as 1947, long after the Profintern's dissolution. In discussing the nature of the CPUSA's support of the third-party presidential candidacy of Henry Wallace, he advised the Americans that 'in trade union tactics it is not the job of a labour leader to co-operate with the more radical political leaders but it is the job of the radical political leaders to co-operate with the labour leaders'.⁵⁸ The party's endorsement of Wallace, he suggested, should only be predicated upon widespread support for his candidacy in the mainstream American trade union movement. Nonetheless, in 1947, the CPUSA leadership, responding primarily to emanations from Moscow, pressured union cadre to endorse Wallace, often against the latter's interests and instincts. Wallace's defeat contributed further to the isolation of communist and leftist leaders of the CIO at a time of increasing Cold War pressures on the Communist-Labour alliance in the powerful American industrial union federation. As the

debacle surrounding the communists' endorsement of Wallace in 1947–48 illustrated, the party's complex but ultimately irrevocable connection with Soviet politics in the Cold War era proved quite damaging.⁵⁹

Lozovsky's ability to advocate a degree of latitude for trade union communists always depended unambiguously on his relations with the Soviet party and the Comintern, especially in the period following Stalin's seizure of power. His willingness to negotiate this ambiguous and dangerous political terrain is illustrated as early as 1921–22 by his public declarations of an organic and subsidiary relationship between the Comintern and the Profintern while allowing some departure from that stricture in theory and practice. The contradictions of his career are most starkly illustrated by the fact that Lozovsky, despite his substantial contributions to the cause of anti-fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, had been deeply complicit in third period policies that aided Hitler's rise to power in Germany. The accusations he faced at the end of his life of 'double accounting' and working against the party while covertly following another line are reminiscent of accusations against syndicalists in the American and British parties by their factional opponents. In Lozovsky's politics and career, there was a certain cynicism, evasiveness and willingness to compromise with Stalinist power that proved durable in its particular context, but ultimately fatal.

What are the implications of Lozovsky's career for the historiography of American communism? The opening of Comintern archives has understandably resulted in a number of works focusing on the party's relationship, often covert, with the Soviet 'centre'. However, a more labour-focused perspective delineating the strain of syndicalism evident throughout the party's history suggests that the RILU may have been comparable to the Comintern in its overall effect on the history of American communism. Historians have routinely traced the continuities between the party's early organizing efforts in the 1920s, supported and protected by the Profintern, and the party's successes in helping to organize the CIO in the 1930s and 1940s. 'Organizing labor was, in the party's eyes, the chief task', recollected one high-ranking cadre. Operating far from the intrigues of espionage cabals, the CIO from 1935 to 1947 was the communists' 'greatest source of institutional power', as even conservative historians have acknowledged.⁶⁰

One careful historian of the CIO has concluded that communist trade unionists were inclined to put 'workers' interests ahead of party shifts, even during WWII'. In addition, it was evident during the CIO

era, as another observer has put it, that the 'trade union communists had not normally submitted themselves to regular party discipline'.⁶¹ The relative independence and positioning of such trade union 'influentials' created the most salient tensions over power and orthodoxy for the Communist party in the post-Comintern era.⁶² Thus, what constituted a 'good communist' in the context of working-class activism remained problematic, rather than given. In a recent study, Zeitlin and Stepan-Norris affirmed that unions that were communist-led or had a strong communist presence were more democratic in governance, less inclined to cede 'management prerogatives' in their contracts and more responsive to racial grievances than were unions without significant communist influence. The communists in such unions were more than occasionally capable of flexible adaptation to local circumstances. Thus, to a significant extent, the communist trade union movement in the United States – even during and following the period of 'Stalinization' – was built from 'the bottom up' in a way that Lozovsky both endorsed and would have appreciated.⁶³

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